Duplicate
received by exchange
79.

LIBRARY
WESTERN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
EVANSTON, ILLINOIS

QE58
H867
20140

Library of the
Church Divinity School
of the Pacific

Frederick Grant
1930

THE GREAT FORERUNNER

PUBLISHED BY
CONSTABLE & CO LIMITED
10–12 ORANGE STREET
LONDON W.C. 2

India . Central Europe.
Scandinavia.

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

Bombay	*B.I. Building, Nicol Road*
Calcutta	*30 E. Chowringhee Road*
Madras	*Anjuman Building, Mount Road*
Leipzig	*Barthels Hof, Markt 8*
Copenhagen	*St. Kongensgade 40 H*

Canada

THE MACMILLAN CO. OF CANADA LTD

Toronto	*St. Martin's House, Bond Street*

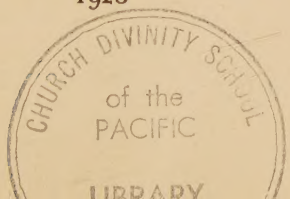
LIBRARY
WESTERN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
EVANSTON, ILLINOIS

THE GREAT FORERUNNER

STUDIES IN THE INTER-RELATION OF PLATONISM AND CHRISTIANITY

by
JOHN S. HOYLAND, M.A.

LONDON
CONSTABLE & CO LTD
1928



B
645
H6
1928

NAGPUR
1928

Printed in Great Britain by Butler & Tanner Ltd., Frome and London

QE58
H867

FOREWORD

IT may be advisable, at the beginning of this little book, to set down something regarding the various strands of thought and experience which have gone towards its make-up.

The first of these is ten years spent upon the study of the Classics, and especially of the Greek Classics.

The second is an upbringing in a Quaker home, and the finding of an increasing measure of spiritual satisfaction in the faith of the Quakers, especially as regards the Inward Light.

The third is the spending of what is now more than fifteen years in educational work in India, where the problems which arise from contact with different systems of thought and faith drive a man continually to seek to discover new depths of truth in his own thought and faith.

The fourth, and by far the most important, is the experience of the Living Christ, and an always increasing belief in Him as Incarnate God.

Acknowledgments are due to the Jowett Trustees for permission to use quotations from Jowett's translation of Plato. In some of these italics and capital letters have been inserted.

J. S. H.

Z 0140

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2026

https://archive.org/details/greatforerunner0000john

CONTENTS

PART I

CHAP.		PAGE
I	The Good News according to Plato	3
II	Plato and Christ	20
III	The Old and the New	41

PART II

THE TEACHINGS OF PLATO

The Divine Purpose in Creation	60
The Meaning of the World	68
The Love of God	69
The Will of God	74
The Idea of Beauty	76
The Idea of Goodness	87
"Resist not Evil"	96
Worship	98
Sin	99
Happiness	110
The Value of the Average Man	114

PAGE

HUMILITY 115

TRUTHFULNESS 117

IMMORTALITY 118

THE BEATIFIC VISION 128

EDUCATION 132

WEALTH 148

FREEDOM 150

THE IDEA OF PROGRESS 159

THE IDEAL STATESMAN 164

THE IDEAL STATE 170

THE IDEAL PHILOSOPHER 172

PLATONISM IN TOLSTOY 174

MODERN PLATONISM 177

THE SUMMING-UP OF THE WHOLE MATTER . . 182

PART I

CHAPTER I

THE GOOD NEWS ACCORDING TO PLATO

PLATONISM is a vast and intricate system of faith and of philosophy, and a system which seems to the casual thinker to have been dead and buried these fifteen hundred years or more.

As a matter of fact, however, that system was founded upon a very simple central thought, and a thought which is of the most profound significance for mankind not merely to-day, but for ever.

The central thought of Platonism is this : that God is to be thought of, and experienced, as expressing Himself in and through the material world : and that, God being perfect goodness, wherever we see goodness in the world around us, we see (even though dimly) a manifestation of the real nature of God.

This is the root meaning, and the permanently valuable and creative element, in the Platonic idealism. The simple statement just given may be expanded by saying that to Plato this divine goodness includes beauty, truth, joy, love, and all other spiritual excellence ; but that these are to be thought of (as is quite clearly brought out in a large variety of passages, not only in the *Timaeus*,

the *Laws* and other Dialogues, but also in the *Republic* itself) as summed up in a divine Personality, in a living and personal God, whose creative will works unceasingly in the world for the fashioning of His own likeness, through the breeding in human souls of goodness, beauty, truth, joy, love, and all other excellence.

Thus the Good News according to Plato has three main elements in it. In the first place it is Good News about God—that He is perfect goodness, and that He works for the creation of goodness in this world.

In the second place it is Good News about man—that our lives are given us that they may be lived in accordance with this divine purpose of goodness. Much of Plato's greatest writing has for its motive the working out of theories and systems through which men may learn how their social and political life—and especially the great enterprise of education—may be so organized as to promote the divine purpose of the creation of goodness.

In the third place the Good News according to Plato is Good News about man's finding of God. For He is to be recognized, learnt about, and experienced, as revealing Himself in and through goodness, truth, love, joy, beauty, and all other excellence, wherever we see these God-like and God-manifesting qualities.

Let us suppose that we are modern Platonists—that we have drunk in these conceptions, and have accepted the Good News according to Plato in the three aspects just considered—what will be our outlook on the world? That outlook will be

profoundly influenced by our Christianity, as will be pointed out later on in this book ; but, even before considering the modern Platonist's position in the light of Christianity, it is possible to lay down certain broad lines of thought concerning his attitude, experience, and belief.

In the first place, he will be an incurable optimist regarding the future of mankind, and regarding the nature and lives of the men around him. His belief is founded firmly upon a God who is deliberately and with infinite wisdom and skill at work in His world, and at work at the task of making it a better world. Philosophically there are nowadays a number of converging lines of testimony concerning the Being of this God. But whether we are chiefly attracted by the Bergsonian theory of the *élan vital*, or by Spengler's 'Will functioning through the world-as-becoming,' or by any one of half a dozen other contemporary theories, all of which bear a striking family resemblance to each other, we are at least justified in declaring that the thought of our age, scientific as well as philosophical, is tending with more and more definite emphasis not merely tacitly to concede, but vocally to demand, the existence of a God such as we have spoken of in connection with Platonism.

God, then, is to be thought of as being at work in the world, actively and untiringly, and as being at work for its good.

Not only so, but the Platonist will believe that every single human being around him is a field of this divine activity : that God's work for the creation of goodness resembling His own goodness

is going forward in all hearts, even though they may be the hearts of criminals and of savages. In every human being, sooner or later, we shall expect to discover, however deeply hidden, traces of this divine working. We shall expect to discover goodness which is not merely a dim reflection of the divine goodness, but is actually the divine goodness itself, breaking through there into the world of matter in which we live.

Hence, wherever we go, we shall go optimistically, confident that we shall find God at work, and God's work somewhere and somehow succeeding. We shall be like astronomers, whose calculations have given them absolute certainty that in a given patch of sky a new planet will be discovered if they look for it. We shall be as confident of finding God when we come into contact with a new personality as those astronomers are of finding their planet when at last on the given occasion they turn their telescopes to that space of the heavens which their well-founded faith in the consistency of the universe has bidden them to scan.

But this principle of optimism must not only be thought of as governing our relations with other men, in the ordinary affairs of an active life. It also governs our attitude towards other systems of thought and faith, and our attitude towards distant ages of time. We shall expect to find, and we shall find, that God has been striving to reveal Himself through other religions than our own, through the thought of ancient sages, through faithful souls of all races and times who have genuinely sought for Him.

Thus, if we are living amongst men of alien culture or belief—even though this may be in many ways low and primitive culture or belief—we shall continually find ourselves rejoicing at glimpses which we have caught of God's self-revelation amongst souls that seem in many ways to be so distant and incomprehensible.

So also in our reading, we shall find ourselves—if we are genuinely zealous in the search for the self-revelation of God—continually marking passages, even in the most unlikely sort of books, as giving us glimpses of this self-revelation.

In short, as we go through the world, we shall go in a spirit of hope and gladness, confident that the goodness, truth, love, beauty and joy, which are the Spirit of God, will discover themselves to us wherever we look for them, and that as we recognize them we shall continually learn more and more about the God who is our Home and the Lover of our souls.

In the second place, the Platonic outlook upon the world, and upon the soul's task of discovering God, means that in pursuance of that task the method to be adopted is the recognition of the highest elements we know of in humanity around us as a genuine revelation of the divine nature. Since God is perfect goodness, and perfect goodness manifesting itself in an undying process through this world in which we are set, in order to recognize the Spirit of God, and to learn about His true nature, we must look around us and hit upon the highest human goodness we have ever heard of or seen, and then say to ourselves, " That

is the most satisfactory and complete manifestation of God I have yet discovered : God is as good as that—at least as good as that—and I may be quite certain that He is infinitely better." In this connection it is to be remembered that the Platonic "goodness" includes every form of moral excellence, as well as beauty, joy, truth and love.

This method of the realization of God will be found to be of the greatest and most practical help in the every-day devotional life of our souls. The Platonic outlook upon the world means that the soul's one real duty is to set itself in line with the divine purpose and process of self-manifestation. We have to become like God, and to help the environment in which we are set to become as God would have it. But to this end it is essential, as Plato is never tired of pointing out, that the soul should dwell in contact with the divine reality, and should have its eyes fixed upon that reality in the Beatific Vision. If we are to help God to kindle His likeness in the world, we must first know what God is, and bear fellowship with Him, and draw strength for our souls and likeness to Him from such fellowship.

To this end—the practice of the presence of God—it is essential that we should come into spiritual contact with the goodness, beauty, truth, joy and love which are the manifestation of God in the world around us.

In the daily practice of communion we shall therefore begin by pondering on the highest human manifestation which we have ever known, either through our own personal experience or

through what we have read, of these aspects of the Being of God. We shall call up before our minds, in as concrete a manner as possible, images of experiences which reflect to us the divine nature through goodness, beauty, truth, love and joy as we know them in this world ; and always we shall remind ourselves that the image in question is but the faintest reflection of the reality of the divine perfection in that attribute which we are considering.

All this means, of course, that if we are following the thought of Plato regarding the self-manifestation of God through human excellence, we are also—and this is a far more important thing—following the method of Christ when He took the highest type of human love, in the love of parent for child, and said of it, " How much more shall your Father which is in Heaven . . ."

In the pursuance of this method of devotion—which, if we follow the thought of Plato, is also a method of preparation for every type of genuinely well-directed activity in the world, and especially for the activity of the educationist and the statesman—we shall first call to mind the most perfectly beautiful sight we have ever seen, whether in the sphere of nature or in the sphere of humanity : and we shall fix our minds on the conception that God is in His own Being infinitely more beautiful than that.

Next we may call to mind the purest and most exquisite Joy we have ever known or heard of, and realize that God in His own Being is Joy infinitely more perfect than that.

Next we may recall the most vivid instance we

possess in memory, or have heard or read of, regarding those occasions when suddenly the world of sense and appearance seems to slip away from a man's soul, leaving him, as it were, gasping and rubbing his eyes in a totally new universe, making him feel himself like a bird which, after losing itself in a thick and noisome fog-bank, has suddenly soared up into the sunshine and beauty of hill-top and sky above the mists. Recalling how our spirits have soared forth into a totally different world, and a world of an incredibly deeper degree of truth and reality, we shall remind ourselves that God is Truth.

Next we shall call to mind the most perfectly good thing we have ever known or read of—for example, a party of miners going down into a burning pit, to face death in any number of unimaginably horrible forms, in order to rescue their entombed comrades—and we shall remind ourselves that God is infinitely better than that perfect good in just that aspect of goodness.

This will lead us on to consider goodness under a great number of other aspects, besides those of courage and self-sacrifice just instanced. We shall consider the divine goodness as shown forth in the highest human generosity, kindliness, humility, simplicity, patience, and any number of other qualities. We shall realize indeed, before we have gone very far with this type of thought, that these names for various types of excellence are simply labels affixed by the mind of man to various aspects of what is essentially one divine unity, the Spirit of God ; and this will be recognized as meaning that every day of our lives, and also

every human personality we meet, should show us some fresh aspect of the divine goodness, so that it will be entirely impossible to differentiate the various aspects by assigning the names of appropriate virtues to each. We may perhaps come in time to a state of mind in which we find the aspects of the divine goodness falling into classes in our mind in accordance with the medium of their revelation to us, so that we can look back and say, "That side of God's goodness was chiefly shown to me through So-and-So's personality, or through such-and-such a book"; and as we think of the person or the book in question, we shall realize that our experience of God in this respect, starting from so commonplace a beginning, has broadened out into a new and wonderful acquaintanceship of our souls with ultimate reality.

In this fashion we shall continually be enriching our experience of the divine goodness, under a great and indeed entirely limitless variety of different aspects.

Finally we must strive to awaken in our souls the realization of the meaning of the Love of God. We shall think perhaps of the love of the Father of the Prodigal Son, or of Christ when He set the children on His knee, and we shall pass on from that to recall the most perfect human love we have ever seen or known. This may be a seemingly commonplace thing. Most probably it will be a love which has been brought to its perfection in our own immediate environment, and it is to be hoped in our own homes. It will perhaps be the love which we remember as having been shown

towards ourselves by our own mother or father, or the love which we have seen shown to our children by their mother. Sometimes, even, we may find that our realization of the love of God is helped by reminding ourselves of the love which beats through us for our children, and which, when it is at its best, we know to be entirely selfless and redemptive. We may say, " If I, in all my weakness and folly, can feel like this towards my child, what then is the Love of God ? "

But whatever is the special expression of love which ' speaks to our condition ' as the highest we have experienced, we must fix our minds on this, and recall the fact that the Love of God is infinitely fuller and deeper, more selfless and more redemptive than this highest human love we have ever known.

Again, it is scarcely needful to point out that in practising the presence of God in this simple fashion, and in proceeding from the highest we know in the sphere of human excellence to the realization that God is better still, we are exactly following the method of Christ, who took human fatherhood, and human family-relations generally, at their best, and then said that God is like that, only far more so.

It is extraordinary indeed how fruitful is this Platonic method—which is also the method advocated and practised by Christ—of learning more and ever more about the nature and meaning of God (this enterprise of learning about God is, as Plato continually insists, the most fundamentally important of all human pursuits). If we train ourselves in the Platonic attitude of mind, con-

sidered from this point of view, we shall find ourselves going through the world continually asking ourselves, " What have I learnt about the eternal Fact of God to-day ? How has His Light shone into the world around me, so that I could behold it ? What has this personality and that, met perhaps for the first time, or perhaps for the ten-thousandth, told me about Him ? How has the Idea of Goodness and Beauty, which I know to be the ultimate reality behind the universe, manifested itself to me through this relationship or through that ? Have I missed seeing it anywhere ? Have I spoiled the chance of seeing it, and so of learning more about God, through carelessness or petulance, or any other fault ? Am I in earnest in my quest for the Vision of that Idea of Goodness and Beauty in every sort of person and circumstance ? Am I careful about continually building up in my mind all the scattered manifestations I see of it into one ever more perfect whole, into an ever-expanding and ever-deepening faith in God ? "

To choose a very simple example of what such an attitude may mean, and an example taken, after the manner of Christ, from the relationships of family-life :—

Any of us who are fathers are thereby set in a very ordinary but none the less very extraordinary position of advantage for realizing through personal experience the significance of the divine love (since that is Father-love, and ours is father-love, and all love is one manifestation of the eternal reality, the Idea of love behind the universe). It may happen that for a time, whilst the mother of

our children is away from home, or is ill, we have been responsible for the care of a small child. Such an experience will be one which is full of deep spiritual lessons, full of the Light of God, and of the manifestation of the divine Idea of Goodness and Love.

We shall discover, in the first place, that the more a little child needs us, the more our hearts are drawn out to love him. And in this fact we shall find a great illumination cast upon the nature of the divine love for man. Through this simple relationship will break forth a clear vision of the eternal truth of God's Being. The weaker we are, it is evident, the more God's tenderness and grace abound towards us. The more entirely defenceless and dependent our souls are in relation to Him, the more closely does His divine Love besiege our souls. The more entirely unworthy and incapable we know ourselves to be of God and His Love, the more generously and redemptively is that Love poured forth for us. When we are feeblest and loneliest, then He is strongest and closest to us.

In the second place we shall find that any service, even the most commonplace, for example, the preparation of food, when it is done for one whom we truly love, is a sacrament. It is done as a holy rite, as an expression and utterance of love, because it is done for the sake of him whom we love. This is another fact of commonplace relationship through which there may burst upon our souls a vision into the heart of divine reality. On the one hand, the more we love God, the more plainly we shall discern that any service done in His name is a

sacramental thing, an expression of the soul's love for the divine Lover. On the other hand, we shall realize that, God's love being a perfect love, this perfect fact of the sacramental quality of service must find a place in the divine perfection also. God delights to serve us, to serve humanity, in simple ordinary ways (for example, by tending lepers, by playing with and blessing little children, by going about amongst the poor helping them : and more generally, by living the life of a poor man for the help of poor men) : and He delights to do it, not only at one point in history, but now and for ever, so that, if we are in the right relationship of love towards Him, we may ask for His help in simple ways, and know that He will delight to render that help as a sacrament of His Love.

In the third place, we shall realize that though the one who is served may never know or comprehend what we are doing for him, we still serve him with joyful and reverent care, simply because we are serving Him whom we love. And we shall perceive here also a gleam of the splendour of God's own Being. God loves His creatures, even those who are wayward and sinful, infinitely more than we can love our children. He gives His rain and His sun to unjust as well as to just. Men may be utterly neglectful of Him and of His care. Yet His eternal yearning for their love and their fellowship can never be satisfied. He must continue to love them and serve them, to bless them in manifold practical ways, just because He is Love, and because Love takes its secret delight in doing good to him who is loved, even though he may never know it or requite it by his affection,

and even though he may be ungrateful and rebellious.

In the fourth place, we shall find that a companionship of practical service on the one hand, and of trustful dependence on the other, is the ideal medium though which love may grow stronger and stronger into a perfect union. Here again there is a dazzling revelation of divine truth—a revelation which is the inevitable outcome of the fact that God is love and that all true love is one. God finds His joy, and the completion of His own divine nature, unfailingly and unceasingly in the meeting of the needs, however humble and commonplace, of His children who trust in Him. On the other hand, man finds the same, perfect joy and the completion of his nature, in just this trustful dependence on God. It is a mutual relationship, in which both divine and human find fulfilment of the highest good, and the true meaning of their existence. And it is essentially this, because God is Love and all true love is one.

Thus, as man comes to love God in conscious and deliberate dependence upon Him, God's nature of love finds its completion in creating the same nature of love in man. Plato is right when he declares that the divine activity is the creation of likeness to God. That creative working gives origin to a reciprocal process. God draws ever closer and closer to man as man becomes more like God through dependence upon Him and through sharing His nature of goodness and love. It is a marvellous ascending spiral, leading us ever on to loftier heights of experience in the infinite closeness, and yet the eternal differentiation (without

which love cannot exist), of this love-relationship. And the Platonic teaching that it was to make such experience possible that the worlds were created, is proved to our souls as ever more fundamentally true.

In the fifth place, we shall learn that where love is, there God is. We shall reverently come to recognize in ourselves a force not ourselves working through us in our love for the helpless being whom we long to serve. The recognition of this force working through us will make us almost tremblingly aware, on the one hand, that we are in our own character utterly unworthy and incapable of being the vehicle for this great and divine thing, and on the other hand that this was why we were born—why we were built up out of the dust—why the race of which we are the latest and least representatives was formed out of nothing, through a period which, after all, is but yesterday when looked at in view of the immensities of astronomical history.

Again, in the love of our children for ourselves we shall come to feel the presence of the same force.

Realizing these things, we shall know *in personal experience*, and not as a matter of mere academical knowledge, that the Platonic teaching is true: that the divine Idea of goodness and love does indeed seek to express itself through human lives, and that, if the individual will be set into accord with this universal Will, then however dimly and secretly, a manifestation of divine reality will take place.

The above illustration of this truth—in the relationship between father and child—has been

brought into use because, on the one hand, it is an exceedingly simple and commonplace fact, and can be verified in the ordinary experience of the average man : whilst, on the other hand, it is the illustration used by Jesus Christ Himself when He sought to establish the truth of the divine nature in the minds of His hearers. But, once we become in the slightest accustomed to this Platonic outlook upon the world, we shall find ourselves recognizing its applicability and its fruitfulness in a thousand different ways. We shall indeed hardly be able to open a newspaper or to walk down the street without finding awaiting us the joy of the recognition of God. We shall read in the paper some story of fearlessness or of unselfishness. In the street we shall discern in the faces of some at least of the passers-by a fleeting glimpse of the divine Idea which is seeking to realize itself through those individuals : and we shall see actions of kindliness performed which we shall know to be breakings-through of the divine Will of love. We shall find that our outlook upon the world is wholly changed. The cynicism and the jaundice will be washed clean out of us. We shall not be able to despair of anybody at all, because through all created beings we shall see the divine Will beating, the Divine Idea ceaselessly striving to express itself in its own true nature of goodness and love.

Plato himself, as he thought out the implications of the incredibly splendid vision of truth which he had seen, realized that, since God is what He is, and since His Will is the creation of the likeness of Himself through human person-

ality—the realizing of the divine Idea of goodness, beauty and love—there are two closely interconnected realms of human activity which are of fundamental importance. In the first place there is the realm of education, and in the second place there is the realm of State-life.

Plato himself devoted two massive treatises, the *Republic* and the *Laws*, to the consideration of the ideal organization of the State. Many of his conclusions must appear to us in our modern world grotesque ; and yet the main principles elucidated by his discussion stand firm. They have, moreover, been of immense importance for all subsequent progress, and the very idea of progress itself is to be traced to them.

Both in the two great treatises just mentioned, and in most of his other Dialogues, Plato continually returns to the discussion of education. How are the citizens of the ideal State to be trained ? What are the conceptions, political, ethical, and above all religious, which must be implanted in their minds ? What false ideas must be cleared away before we can have a right-thinking citizenry ? These and other similar problems are continually coming up for solution throughout the Platonic writings.

But before passing on to a consideration of the actual teachings of Plato in regard to the Being of God, the Ideal State, a right system of education, and so forth, we must first consider the relationship between Christianity and Platonism, both two thousand years ago and to-day.

CHAPTER II

PLATO AND CHRIST

THIS is not the place for a consideration of the manner in which the Platonic system of thought acted as a *preparatio evangelica*, and may still so act. But from time to time the question is bound to arise : How may a believing Christian accept the teachings of a pre-Christian seer, Plato, and align them with his belief in the Incarnation and Atonement ?

In endeavouring to answer this question, it is advisable to point out, in the first place, that the Platonic *method* of thought and discovery about God is fundamentally Christian.

We have seen how, in endeavouring to put into practice that Platonic method, and to realize the meaning of Plato's belief in God as the Idea of Goodness [1] manifesting Himself through the world, we must take the best and the noblest elements in the humanity around us, and recognizing in them the partial fulfilment of this divine purpose, must

[1] The word Idea (printed with a capital) is used here, as throughout this book, in the technical Platonic sense of fundamental reality expressing itself throughout the visible world.

say to ourselves, 'God is like that, only infinitely more so.'

This was, of course, precisely the method by which Christ taught men about God. He took fatherhood at its best, in the Parable of the Prodigal Son (which in all probability was framed from a definite incident in the village-life around Him); and He said to His hearers, 'Here is a good and loving human father. Well, God is as good and loving as that, only far better and more loving.'

Again, He took a quality like that of faithful self-sacrifice in a shepherd; and He said that the divine nature is like that of a Good Shepherd who gives his life for the sheep.

He took a mother's anxious care over such a trifling matter as the growth of her child's hair; and he said, 'God is as anxiously loving towards you as a mother is towards her child.'

He took, deliberately, a bad man, and showed how even through a bad man the divine Light might shine, and the divine Idea be in one respect at least realized; for even a bad man will give good food to his children; and therefore God, who is altogether good, will certainly care for those who are in need and who cry to Him.

Many other instances might be given of the fact that Christ looked out on the world, and saw God in it, from what we may call a Platonic standpoint; and in saying this as Christians what we mean is that Platonism is *true*, and the Platonic standpoint the only right one.

The whole parabolical method of teaching, as practised by Jesus Christ, is an instance of the

same thing. It is not a method which relies upon elaborate and misleading metaphor, or upon far-fetched and preposterous analogy. It is not fanciful or ingenious. It is not to be compared, for instance, with the method of Shelley (however beautiful that method may have been in application) when he lights up the ordinary fact of a skylark by saying that it is like a cloud of fire, or of autumn leaves by saying that they are like ghosts fleeing before an enchanter. Christ's method of teaching by parable is used by Him because simple things do genuinely show forth divine reality, because we may actually see in them the manifestation of the Idea of Goodness and Love, which is God. In other words it is used Platonically. The Parable of the Good Samaritan, for instance, shows us the Idea of Goodness and Love manifesting itself very plainly under certain circumstances and in relation to a certain concrete problem, that of race-hatred. The Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen shows us the Idea of Goodness and Love in conflict with sin and adopting a certain method to overcome sin. Above all, the Parable of the Last Judgment shows us the manner in which the Idea of Goodness and Love is bound to work itself out in ordinary human lives if it is to gain success at all in its eternal creative activity for Godlikeness.

This consideration leads us on to recognize that Christ's fundamental and most characteristic teachings—those on the Fatherhood of God and the Kingdom of God—are essentially Platonic (which is, to the Christian, the same thing as saying that Plato was right when he gave his teaching about God manifesting His true nature through human

goodness, and about God's Will that the State-life of mankind should constitute a corporate manifestation of His own divine goodness). For the very term 'the Fatherhood of God' means that the reality of the divine nature of love and tenderness is not merely manifested through human fatherhood, but is—in the opinion of the greatest of all teachers of religion—best to be recognized and apprehended through the contemplation of such fatherhood. And on the other hand, the foreshadowing of Christian truth in the Platonic teaching of the Kingdom of God is plainly to be seen by anyone who thinks out the implications of Plato's theory of the Ideal State, which is conceived of as a community of men bound together in a disciplined and permanently-sustained endeavour to carry out in their corporate life the divine will of goodness and Godlikeness.

But Christ is not only Platonic in His method of teaching, i.e. Plato is not only right, and miraculously right, in insisting that the truth of God is to be apprehended through the beholding of the highest human excellence we know of, and that the fulfilment of God's Will for the propagation of goodness is best to be achieved through a God-directed corporate life. The whole Platonic outlook is a preparation for the attitude to the world which makes belief in the Incarnation possible.

Plato had taught that, however gross and un-Godlike the world around us may sometimes appear, there is yet to be seen in it, and above all there is to be seen through the medium of human personality as the vehicle of human excellence, a

real manifestation of the nature of the eternal God. In other words, Plato does not agree with those who, in many lands and many ages, have held and taught that human nature is wholly corrupt, and that the world in which man's life is passed is an abode merely of agony, wickedness and despair. On the contrary, as we have already seen, the Platonic outlook on the world, on humanity, and on the scope of man's life in the world, is profoundly optimistic ; for the world itself is seen to be an environment wherein humanity, by identifying itself with the will of God, may become steadily and progressively more Godlike, and may bring into existence ever higher and higher manifestations of the divine nature of goodness, beauty and love.

The Incarnation means that this Platonic hopefulness of outlook upon the world and man's life in the world is consecrated as eternal truth. The Incarnation means that, after an infinitely long process of pre-human and human development, God had at last brought into being a creature, man, whose physical and mental make-up—the mere outward machinery of his body and brain —were capable of expressing fully and perfectly the Being of God, which is goodness and love. The Incarnation means that the Platonic assertion that the world is in some measure already fit to be the vehicle for the manifestation of God, and is so intended in the divine Will, is eternally true ; for God could come in Christ and manifest Himself fully in the world. It means also that the Platonic teaching regarding the high destiny of human life, in its physical, its mental and its spiritual nature

—as a potential vehicle of Godlikeness—is true also ; for Christ wore a human body and brain, and showed the full likeness of God through them ; Christ bade His followers, down through all ages, be perfect even as God is perfect, and promised them that if they dwelt in spiritual communion with the Divine, the love which was in God and in Christ should be in them also.

But this is not the only point of view from which what may be called a Platonic approach to the Incarnation is of the greatest helpfulness and hopefulness for our modern age.

Platonism bids us learn about the true nature of God from the beholding of the highest excellence in man. It is an immensely valuable conception. But anyone who has thought about it at all seriously, and has read Plato with a genuinely constructive desire to get at the permanent truth behind his teachings, must sooner or later have been confronted by the question, ' Where is your criterion of excellence ? ' Indeed Plato himself is deeply impressed with the need for answering this question, which is debated over and over again from beginning to end of his Dialogues. He shows us the mind of Socrates as having been so completely filled by the desire to find out the real meaning of excellence, and the criteria by which it should be judged, that he made himself intensely unpopular, and indeed brought about his prosecution and death, as a result of the ceaseless inquiries made by him on this most profoundly important (as Plato felt) of all subjects.

But in spite of the immense labours which Plato gave to the exploration of this question concerning

the ultimate criterion of excellence, and therefore (for in the Platonic scheme of thought the two things are inseparably connected) concerning the fundamental nature of God and of His Will for Godlikeness, no modern reader is likely to feel that Plato has succeeded in reaching a satisfactory conclusion as to what really does constitute the highest goodness, which by hypothesis is God's nature. It is a question which is fundamental to all religions, and to all genuine seeking after truth. Indian religion, after its immense labours for the discovery of spiritual reality, came to the conclusion that the highest good is the absence of desire. The finest thought of China decided that the highest good is the character which is moulded on the model of ideal filial piety. The greatest of the world's tragedies, Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, is concerned with the devastating effects upon a sensitive soul of the conflict between two ideals of goodness in conduct, that which bids a man revenge a cruel wrong done to one he honours and loves, and that which forbids bloody revenge under any circumstances.

Indeed Shakespeare, the widest-spirited and most discerning of all thinkers upon the nature of human life in the world, is during his greatest period continually obsessed by this same fundamental inquiry after an absolute standard of right and wrong. His most famous and profound tragedies are all wrought out, in a white heat of passionate eagerness, as the enunciation of this eternal demand for light on the true nature of goodness. *Othello* shows us the conflict between the ideal of faithfulness and the ideal of tenderness

and trust. *Macbeth* shows us the conflict between the two standards of good represented by loyalty on the one hand and by the knowledge of capacity to rule on the other. *Julius Caesar* shows us the conflict between the love of freedom and the law, 'Thou shalt do no murder'—both good things. *Lear* shows us the conflict between paternal tenderness and the kingly spirit of command. *Coriolanus* shows us the conflict between filial obedience and faithfulness to undertakings.

Shakespeare is but one instance, though an outstanding instance, of this eternal quest of the human spirit for an absolute standard of righteousness. It is a quest which is made the more insistently urgent by the Platonic outlook on the world. If we are to go about looking for God everywhere, and seeing Him manifested before our eyes in human goodness, we are blinded, our quest is futile, the Platonic optimism becomes a grim scoffing at our ineffective gropings, unless we have a sure standard of goodness whereby we may recognize and rejoice in the divine likeness (which is the very fact of the divine presence) whenever we see it. For how otherwise are we to know what is genuinely good and genuinely Godlike in a world built up on the idealism of shrewd selfishness?

To the Christian Platonist, therefore, everything depends upon the Incarnation. Without the Incarnation—the full and perfect Incarnation—of God in Christ his hope is despair and his certainty futility. Without the Incarnation what reply has he for the Nietzschean doctrine that love is sentimental folly, and self-assertion the highest

good? [1] But given that Incarnation, by which he may judge all goodness and all Godlikeness, his Platonism finds its true meaning and content, and becomes a Good News indeed. Goodness and Godlikeness become to him Christlikeness. He goes forward through the world seeking and finding Christlikeness in men, creating it around him by his own unconscious example, bending all his thoughts and ambitions to the one great end of fulfilling God's will for Christlikeness. As we come to understand this Platonic-Christian outlook, we perceive that the Will of God for the manifestation of Himself in the world, about which Plato had written so constantly and with such inspired insight and faith, is a Will for Christlikeness. God's ideal is no vaguely generalized virtue, no esoteric mystery of union with the divine. It is concrete and personal Christlikeness. It is an ideal which we may, as it were, see and touch and handle. It is a process, a purpose, a Will, which is for ever expressed to humanity, even to the most ignorant and lazy-minded of humanity, in terms, the only terms, which humanity can always understand, namely the terms of human personality.

Moreover it is an ideal in regard to which we may continually refresh our memories and restore our enthusiasm, by the study of Christ—a study that is to be pursued both by the reading of the records of His life on earth (and especially by the

[1] Nor has he an answer, in India, for instance, to those who find ideal excellence in a negative attitude to life, the inhibition of all desire: or in the type of character inculcated in the Quran.

method of teaching them to others) ; but also, and continually, by the practice of His presence in the personal devotion of our spirits.

Thus the Christian Platonist knows that Christ is both the goal ahead of humanity, and the divine urge within humanity for the attainment of that goal. He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Wherever in the men around us we see any trace of Christlikeness, in courage, in patience, in humility, above all in redemptive love, we rejoice exceedingly, because we know that there, in that soul, and to that extent, the divine purpose in creation has been achieved : Christ has been shown forth concretely in yet another human personality.

But there are other and even more profound and wonderful aspects of the meaning and the necessity of the Incarnation as looked at from the point of view of this Christian Platonism.

In the first place, in taking as His sovereign illustration of the nature of God the Light divine which shines through human fatherhood, there was one aspect of such fatherhood which Christ emphasized above all others. That aspect was Love.

The main teaching of Christ about God, and the entirely distinctive and unique element in that teaching, is the assertion that whatever else we may think about God, we must acknowledge this first, last and all the time, that God is Love : that He is Love infinitely deeper, more tender and more perfect than the deepest, most tender and most perfect human love. The goodness of God, which is seen in Plato to be the fundamental fact

behind the universe, is shown by and in Jesus Christ to be summed up and fully expressed through love. Love is proved to be the perfect crown and consummation of all goodness. If it is truly divine love, it carries with it, as an integral element in its own nature, all other goodness, so that the divine perfection is to be summed up under every one of its varied aspects by this simple saying, "God is Love."

Thus the Christian Platonist, in expressing his belief in the divine Idea manifesting its own likeness in an eternal creative activity through the world, does not need to say that God is beauty, truth, joy, goodness *and* love ; but simply by saying that God is Love in Christ's sense, he affirms therein that every perfect attribute, all beauty, truth, joy, goodness, and all other excellence, is summed up in the divine nature, which is Love.

But the essence of love is self-sacrifice. When the lover sees his beloved in pain and danger, in grief or under the imminent threat of a dreadful death, it is not merely true that he eagerly gives himself and all that he is and has in order to provide a way of escape ; but it is even true that if he does not do so, his love is no love at all, but a hollow pretence.

Love simply does not exist if it does not carry with it not merely willingness but zeal to sacrifice everything in order to save from danger and death the one who is beloved. Socrates had given notably practical demonstration of the fact that he understood this great truth, by saving the life of his friend Alcibiades at great risk to himself during the siege of Potidaea, and again by saving

the life of another friend Xenophon at the disastrous rout of Delium. There are indications scattered through the Platonic writings of the fact that Plato had caught, probably from the example thus set by his great Master, a vision—though perhaps a dim and fleeting vision—of the supreme truth that the goodness of God must mean that this element of redemptive love is the key-note to the divine nature. But with Jesus Christ this teaching is fully and plainly expressed, and is set in the only place it can rightly occupy, namely, at the heart of the whole scheme of the universe.

Yet even in enunciating this supreme truth Christ proceeds Platonically : that is to say, He points to the light of redemptive love shining through humanity, and declares that if men can be as good as this in respect to redemptive love, then of a certainty God is far better. This is the significance of the Parable of the Good Shepherd 'who giveth his life for the sheep.' It is the significance also of the saying about His 'giving His life a ransom for many,' which takes, in all probability, a well-known incident of the day—some self-giving of a hero now unknown that he might ransom someone whom he loved from bandits, perhaps—and declares that the divine love manifested through Christ must do the same. It is the significance also of the sayings in the Fourth Gospel regarding Christ's laying down His life for His friends ; for every such saying means that Christ took a certain attribute of humanity, and a well-known and universally-admired attribute, and declared that this supreme excellence is also to be found in God.

Christ taught then that God is Love, and Love so genuinely fatherly that it means that the Universal Father shares in the willingness of the commonest earthly father to sacrifice himself, if need be, that his children may live. All such true fatherly love, working through self-sacrifice for the suffering child, and through self-identification with him in his suffering, is indeed but the palest reflection of the divine reality—the eternal redemptive purpose of self-identification and self-sacrifice which is working in the mind of God towards those who need Him.

We have become accustomed to speak, in the Platonic vein, of the goodness of God manifesting itself through human goodness. Now we can go farther, infinitely farther, and say that wherever there can be found in the heart of man the redemptive love that forces father or mother or friend to strive to save another at the risk of the rescuer's own life, there we have a flash of the Divine Light clear and brilliant beyond all else. God *is* Love, redemptive, self-giving, self-identifying Love ; and wherever such love is to be seen on earth, there God is.

There is to be found a universal silent witness to this truth in the hearts of all mankind ; for everywhere this type of love is felt to be the highest and noblest manifestation of the character that is truly excellent. Amongst men of every race and nation it is tacitly but unquestioningly recognized that there is no courage, no virtue, no manliness, no love superior to that of the man who willingly lays down his own life that others may live. And if we think Platonically, which is also (in this respect

as in so many others) Christianly, we shall declare that it is simply inconceivable that this excellence, which is so far above all other excellences, should exist in man and not exist in God. Indeed, if such excellence does not exist in God, the meanest human being in which it does exist—the most beast-like of savage mothers, for instance, who gives her life for her child ; or a drink-sodden coal-miner who dies to save his comrades after a pit-explosion—is more God than God, since God is goodness and love.

Hence the Platonic method of thought, which is also the method of Christ, in arguing from the known half-good to the divine wholly-good, must lead us inevitably to the conclusion that in God, as the highest thing we can know about God (since it is the highest thing we know in man), there must be the Love that is never content till it gives itself in redemptive self-identification with those whom it loves, but whom it sees wallowing in shame and loss and pain, under the imminent threatening of death.

If God did not strip Himself, and come amongst us in a genuine sharing of our pain and grief, He is no God at all whom we can recognize as God by the standards either of Plato or of Christ. The Incarnation is utterly essential to our whole scheme of thought concerning the being of God and the meaning of man's life in the universe.

But, granting the necessity of the Incarnation to a belief centred Platonically in a God of creative goodness, and Christianly in a God whose goodness is summed up in Love, the question next arises, " Why the Incarnation in Christ? Why not the

Incarnation in Buddha, or in Krishna, or in any one of half a hundred other great religious leaders and prophets?"

The answer to this question has in part already been given. We look at Christ, and see in Him perfect goodness and love, so that Godlikeness is henceforward to us nothing more nor less than Christlikeness. Christ has become the criterion both for God and for man. That is a high reason for hailing the Incarnation in Christ as the final and unique Incarnation.

But it is possible, though unlikely, that the same claim might be put forward for one or other of the great prophets of humanity. For instance, a devout Vaishnava might conceivably declare that Krishna summed up for him in perfection the criterion of true Being both for God and for man.

But did not Christ, as is clear from the interpretation of his Master's mind put forward by the Fourth Evangelist, and also from frequent indications in the Synoptic Gospels, come to realize as his ministry went forward, and as the Cross drew nearer, that He was Himself this final and supreme Incarnation of the Father? Did He not even definitely claim that His followers should accept Himself as this Incarnation?

That a soul so utterly good should have come into knowledge of such a truth, and in spite of its own entire humility and simplicity should have called upon men to recognize that truth, forms in itself an immensely weighty proof that the truth in question was true, and is true for ever.

Yet it is conceivable that here also a devout Vaishnava might point to the passages in the *Gita*

in which Krishna makes somewhat similar claims, and might declare that the contemplation of those passages leads him as irresistibly to the conclusion that Krishna was the unique and final Incarnation of God as the contemplation of the Fourth Gospel leads the Christian to the same conclusion in regard to Christ.

This consideration leads us on to a recognition of the great truth that faith in the Incarnation is not complete and final unless it is accompanied, expounded and perfected by faith in the Atonement.

From a very early period in His ministry—from a period as early at least as the Temptation in the Wilderness—Christ in thinking out the lines of policy which He must follow in His great enterprise of founding the Ideal State, the Kingdom of God, had come to the definite conclusion that this policy could never be one of worldly conquest, of dominion, and of force. In refusing ' to fall down and worship ' Satan He had turned His back on all such unworthy methods of working for God, though there are ample indications in the Gospels of the fact that He believed Himself to be equipped with powers and resources which would make possible and even easy the conquest of all enemies, and the setting up of a world-dominion of righteousness, in which the rule of God's laws should be efficiently enforced.

Instead of ' worshipping Satan ' in this way, by the adoption of worldly methods of extending the influence of the principles which He felt it His mission to proclaim, Christ started deliberately and boldly forth upon the way of the Cross, the

way of suffering, poverty, obscurity, scorn, persecution, death—all of which things were willingly borne by Him in order that the evil will might be turned into the good will; for *so alone*, as He clearly perceived, could the likeness of God be spread abroad through the souls of men. No forced allegiance to right, no lip-service to exalted principles, no law-made goodness imposed upon mankind from without by superior authority (however benevolent), and therefore in the last analysis by fear, can ever produce that spontaneous embracing by the heart of God's Will and God's way of life, which alone can build up in us the likeness of God.

Even from the beginning of His ministry Christ saw with entire distinctness the fact that persuasion and example—the free working of Godlikeness through the methods of liberty and of love—are the only methods by which men can be won into a likeness to God that is any more than skin-deep.

But He also saw what Sin meant. He saw in his own country, and in the Galilean village-environment in which He had been brought up, the appalling and suicidal ferocity of the hatreds which divided man from man, and in so doing brought self-destruction upon humanity. He saw the real meaning of the fanatical Zealot hatred of Rome, and of the proud Roman disdain for the *hostes humani generis*. He saw the real meaning of the scorn of the Pharisees for those, the poor and outcaste, who had no leisure from bread-winning for interminable ceremonial observances, and who therefore were branded as ignorant of the Law and accursed. He saw the real meaning of Jewish

hatred for Samaritan and for tax-gatherer ; and He knew that all these hatreds were the sovereign antithesis, the supreme denial, of a God Who was above all else a God of Love.

Moreover, He perceived with perfect distinctness the fact that the man who designed to stand up against hatred in every form, in pursuance of his task of making known to the world the Love of God by persuasion and not by force, would be ground to powder between these hatreds. He would be left entirely alone. He would be caught between the upper and the nether mill-stone.

Even from the beginning Christ foresaw quite clearly the necessity of the Cross if sin were to be rightly challenged and combated, and the fact of God's Love rightly vindicated.

None the less, from the beginning, ' He set His face steadfastly to go up to Jerusalem.'

And, being God Incarnate, Christ could do nothing else. For God is Love, better than a father's. And if God in Christ had broken all barriers, and had come down Himself into the pit of blood and agony and terror which this world must seem to an infinite intelligence of Love, what else could He do, having thus come, than go forward to the Cross ?

We have seen that the Christian Platonist, in the knowledge that all human goodness is a manifestation, however dim, of the divine goodness, and therefore that all human love is a manifestation of the divine Love, is driven inexorably to declare that unless God somewhere in history comes down amongst us, and shares to the full our agony in the effort to save us, and goes forward even to the

laying down of His own divine life in that enterprise of redemption, then He is simply not God, and we had better worship any poor human being, however frail, who does exhibit this supreme excellence of self-sacrifice even to death on behalf of the beloved.

From this point of view the Cross is inevitable if once it be granted that God is good.

But from another point of view also the Cross is inevitable. For what will a perfectly loving human father do if his children are tearing themselves to pieces in internecine hatred? Obviously he cannot kill them to stop their wickedness—even the least loving of human fathers would scarcely do that. All that he can do is to come between them, and divert their wickedness upon himself, in the belief that by dying to stop their hatred he will in the long run demonstrate to them how evil a thing that hatred is, and turn their minds to repentance and to love. Possibly such a conception of fatherly self-sacrifice may appear insipid and even craven; but if so, then this feeling is but part of the eternal scorn which man has in all ages felt for the foolishness of the Cross.

There is, in truth, no other conceivable manner in which Love may work for its supreme end—the turning of the will of hatred into the will of good, and thereby the breeding of the likeness of God in man. There is no other way but the Cross, even for the least idealistic of human fathers who is genuinely anxious to make his quarrelsome sons not compulsorily but genuinely friendly towards each other. Every such father must have felt the

total inadequacy of punishment for the attaining of this end. He must have felt that a method is needed whereby his boys may come freely and of their own accord to co-operate with each other instead of fighting. If their mutual ill-feeling is really dangerously bitter, he will have longed also for some chance whereby through his own suffering of the effects of their quarrelsomeness he may show to them how evil a thing it is, and turn their minds to a better feeling.

These facts are no esoteric secrets, dealing with some magical rite of regeneration-by-blood, such as the Mithraic *taurobolium*. They are commonplaces of everyday life and practice to anyone who is worth calling a father. For the Cross is not merely an historical fact two thousand years old—even though it is in truth the greatest and most significant of all the facts of history. It is an eternal principle ; and it is to be found manifested in some measure wherever love is ; for God is Love, and all love is one.

Thus the Incarnation is meaningless without the Cross. The redemptive self-sacrifice which brought God in Christ amongst us for our saving, meant also that He gave even His own divine life to that same end ; for otherwise He would not be God, and would not be Love ; and the Cross is the only way of combating sin by the methods of freedom and love, working for the great end of Atonement, achieving the effectual bringing amongst men of the power for Godlikeness, which is the power for Christlikeness, and which means the adoption by the individual human will of the guidance and ruling of the divine Will for Christ-

likeness, so that man may have true fellowship with God. Sin can only be conquered, and the evil will turned into the good will, by God suffering the whole brunt of sin—and hatred is the master-sin, the supreme denial of God's nature—in pursuance of His divine purpose of redemption-into-Godlikeness. That purpose will stop short of no sacrifice, not even the sacrifice of the Cross.

Platonism, we now perceive, was eternally right when it taught that God is good, and that His Will is for the creation of Godlikeness. Christ showed us that the highest goodness is love. Christ was God Incarnate coming amongst men, giving up everything for men, by the unalterable dictation of His nature of Love, in order to save them, and to save them into Godlikeness, which is Christ-likeness. The Cross of Christ is God paying the grimmest and most costly of all prices for this end of redemption. And that Cross brings at last into the world the Power whereby alone men may become Godlike.

For Plato, deeply as he saw into ultimate truth, failed to recognize the powerlessness of man to achieve his ideals.

Christ did not so fail.

CHAPTER III

THE OLD AND THE NEW

THE minds to which the message of the Incarnation and the Cross first came were not Hellenic minds. They were Semitic minds, and they were, for the most part, the minds of peasants, and of Galilean peasants with Zealot leanings.

The long and magnificent record of the achievements of the Jewish religious genius shows us a people whose best and most representative souls evinced, even in the midst of bitter persecution from the mass of their fellow-countrymen, an unconquerable zeal for the One God, and an incontrovertible conviction that God is holy.

On the one hand, the great Jewish prophets were resolute monotheists, and their monotheism was of a transcendental type. God was to them a mighty heavenly potentate. There is little or no trace in their writings of the Platonic conception of God's indwelling the world and manifesting Himself through the highest excellences of humanity. Such a conception would indeed have been repulsive to a people who thought of God as the Jews did, as a divine Ruler and King swaying the world by His fiat.

On the other hand, however, the great Jewish prophets had reached the belief, not only that this heavenly Ruler is Himself holy, and that He requires holiness from His worshippers—a holiness which the greatest teachers had already perceived to be far more than an affair of scrupulous adherence to a set of arbitrary commands: but also that His sway is universal, and that His favours are not confined (as had for long been supposed) to the Jews alone as a 'peculiar people.'

There are traces, moreover, scattered up and down the Old Testament, of a higher conception still, and a conception which was to be of the greatest moment as a *preparatio evangelica*. In the writings of the prophet Hosea, and in certain of the Psalms, for instance, God is thought of as having a heart of love towards humanity.

But in spite of these magnificent elements in the national religious heritage—the tradition of God's universal sway, of His holiness, and of His loving-kindness—the ordinary religion of the Jews in the time of Christ was more of a negative than a positive faith. It concentrated the attention of its followers too largely upon hatred of evil and of evil-doers, and therefore upon a standard of right which was a hard-and-fast code of religious law, through the following of which a man might become 'holy' and so pleasing to the heavenly King. In consequence of this narrow view of truth the Jews had become intensely proud and exclusive, and thereby intensely unpopular in a world which a generation later than the time of Christ, in spite of the contemporary spirit of Roman toleration, was to decide that there was

really nothing to be done with the Jews except to exterminate them.

It was in this environment that the Incarnation took place, and the Cross was borne. The witnesses of those supreme events in the world's history were soon brought to realize that the knowledge of them constituted a compelling burden of responsibility for the publishing of the Good News concerning Bethlehem and Calvary to the other races of mankind. These Jewish peasants—powerfully reinforced by the great mind of St. Paul and the deep spiritual insight of the Fourth Evangelist—set forth to tell a universal story, which, as they had dimly begun to realize, had the most crucial significance for every race of mankind so long as the world should endure.

The enterprise of publishing the Good News being thus launched, of necessity its leaders were almost at once compelled to reckon with the Greek mind, which had already been trained by Platonism for the reception of the universal truth now being proclaimed. The minds of the publishers of that truth were Semitic, conceiving of God as a transcendental Potentate, and as yet imperfectly conscious of the immense revolution which had been brought about in all such conceptions by what we have called the Platonism of Christ, His taking of the highest human love as the deepest and plainest interpretation of the essential Being of God, and His revelation through Incarnation and Cross of the fact that a human body and brain are capable of being the vehicle of God's supreme purpose of redemption. Transcendentalism implies a rigid dualism. If a man conceives

of God as a distant heavenly Potentate, he also conceives of humanity and the world in which it lives as infinitely lower than God ; and if the heavenly Potentate is thought of as austerely holy, human nature is thought of as the reverse. The Semitic bearers of the message of the Incarnation and the Cross were in a sense heavily handicapped in their task of approaching the Greek mind by those very aspects of truth which had been the age-long inheritance of their race.

In India to-day we see the results of the importation of an entirely alien set of religious conceptions, brought by men belonging to a strongly self-conscious racial grouping, and imposed upon an ancient and mystical type of religious consciousness. The result has been that the Indian Christian Church has become Westernized. Its members have felt themselves lifted out of their old environment into a new one. With very noble exceptions they have turned their backs on the religious inheritance of their race, and have become Western Christians, too often with a whole-hearted contempt for Hinduism, with a tendency to adopt Western dress and Western names, and with a feeling that even in the political sphere their allegiance is to England rather than to India. As a typical instance of this tendency an Indian Christian friend of the present writer's may be mentioned, who in response to the urging of various missionaries (who were, as frequently happens, much more 'nationalistic' than the Indian Christians) began to dress his children in Indian dress, but met with great opposition from his fellow Indian Christians, on the ground that

by doing so he was proving himself false to his community and a toady of the missionaries.

This incident illustrates the fact that the presentation of Christianity to India has been carried out in a manner which has tended too much to de-nationalize and de-naturalize the Indian Christians—to cut them off from their association with the past, to sever their connection with the traditional culture of India, to separate them from the hopes and fears of their fellow-countrymen in the present, and therefore to deprive them of their rightful influence upon the future of their country.

It is an immensely significant fact that no such mistake was made in the presentation of Christianity to the Hellenic mind—indeed, if any such mistake had been made, none of us would have been Christians to-day. The Semitic environment of spirit and thought in which the first publishers of Christianity had been trained was separated from the Hellenic environment of spirit and thought by a gap not less wide than that which severs Westerner and Hindu in India to-day ; and yet in spite of this fact Christianity was presented to the Greek world in a manner which almost from the beginning captured the imagination of the best elements in that world, and enlisted their active and enthusiastic support on the side of the new faith, to the interpretation of which—and thereby to its stabilization and survival through the barbarian epoch which was to follow—they devoted their matchless intellectual abilities.

The difference between these two phenomena —the impact of primitive Christianity upon the

Hellenic world, and the impact of modern Christianity upon the Indian world—is of immense significance. That difference is in part to be attributed to the statesmanship of St. Paul, in part to the Platonic *preparatio evangelica* of the Greek mind, and in part to the Fourth Evangelist's spiritual insight into the true meaning of Christ, and to his revolutionary courage shown in interpreting Christ through the doctrine of the Logos, which was in itself a major factor in the Platonic *preparatio evangelica.*

The Fourth Gospel has been justly called the most wonderful book in the world. It is the most masterly and most decisively successful essay in religious synthesis ever attempted. It begins at once by seizing upon the most vital element in current Hellenism—the thought of the universal creative Expression of God (this is the best translation of the word Logos). Philo had already interpreted this Expression, through which God was thought of as moulding the world into likeness to Himself, in the terms of personality. The Fourth Evangelist ensures the future of the Faith by identifying this Expression of God with the eternal Christ—the Christ who fulfilled all that Plato had said in the *Timaeus* concerning the creative activity of God bringing about His 'desire that all things should be like Himself in goodness': the Christ who had been God so working from all eternity, and who fully and finally expressed this divine passion in the Incarnation and the Cross.

The Faith being thus interpreted to them in terms which 'spoke to their condition,' and which

showed them Christ as not merely the fulfilment of their age-long quest after truth, but as Him who had been apprehended beforehand by their own greatest teachers, the Greeks received Christ with joy, and set themselves to serve Him by means of their greatest possession, their power of conceiving and expressing deep abstract truth.

There is no 'missionary imperialism' in the Fourth Gospel. Its writer takes the best elements from the two great streams of religious truth which flowed in his day. He takes the highest witness of the Greek to the indwelling creative self-expression of the Godhead in its eternal urge towards Godlikeness. He takes the highest witness of the Jew to the holiness, the power, the lovingkindness of that Godhead. And he shows Christ as the perfect fulfilment of both strains of thought—Christ in Incarnation and Atonement God expressing Himself by redemptive love to and for all mankind, that all might become Christlike. "I in them, and Thou in me, that they also may be one in us. . . ." "Love one another as I have loved you. . . ."

To the Fourth Evangelist the ancient teaching of the Logos is not—it scarcely needs saying—a bait whereby he may catch the Greek mind for his own system (though nowadays we are prone to use such baits in our contact with alien systems). Although it was ancient, and had originated outside the Jewish tradition, and was the ripe fruit of a totally alien religious development, the teaching of the Logos was to the writer of this marvellous book the very truth of God. In that truth his own soul, which (it is clear) had imbibed with joy the

teachings of the Greek spirit, had found an interpretation of Christ which satisfied him, and which he knew to be a possession that he must hand on to all the world. To this writer Christ *was* the Logos, although the conception of the Logos was in origin purely Greek. The Indwelling Christ, the Christ Within, the Divine Element in man, the manifestation in the individual life of the universal Idea of beauty and goodness, and (on the other hand) the Eternal Christ, the creative Expression of God working from all ages for the creation of the likeness of God in the material world—for the Fourth Evangelist these great conceptions were all united, summed up and explained in the light of the Incarnation and the Cross, through this ancient doctrine of the Logos. The Spirit of God took hold of his knowledge of Platonic teaching and the later development of that teaching, and in a flash of inspiration, which is revealed in the opening verses of his Gospel, showed to him how the two worlds of Greece and Palestine were united round the manger and the Cross when seen in the light of the Logos. The fruit of that inspiration was the yoking of the Greek genius to the cause of Christ, and the forging of the great body of Greek thought concerning Christ, which alone enabled the Church, and therefore civilization, to survive the barbarian deluge.

From the lowest point of view this great synthesis, which was carried through mainly by the Fourth Evangelist, was a thing of the most crucial importance to the life of humanity. For in Christian Platonism, quite apart from the religious

truths which it enshrines, is to be found the root of all progress.

No one can live, as the present writer has done, for many years in close contact with the Oriental mind, and spend his time in teaching, side by side, Oriental history and European history, without being impressed by the fact that there is a subtle difference between these two histories. In European history there is, as it were, an indwelling Idea of progress, working itself out even in the blackest epochs ; but in Indian history one looks in vain for any such influence. Indian history, up to the last few hundred years, has been a dreary record of invasions and despotisms, with no thread of continuous development towards liberty and wider integration running through it, such as is to be discerned in Western history. For the golden age of Indian history it is needful to look back to a vague and shadowy epoch at least two and a half millenniums ago. Since that time, up to a very recent period of the past, there is little to descry except deepening anarchy and tyranny.

In Western history, on the other hand, in spite of a submergence even more complete than occurred in the case of India beneath successive waves of primeval savagery, there has been manifested a miraculous power of resurgence, which has rescued humanity not merely from the great barbarian invasions, but from every succeeding epoch of anarchy or despotism, and has steadily worked forth the practical application of the principles of deepening liberty on the one hand, and of wider and wider integration and co-operation on the other.

This element, which may be spoken of Platonically, for the sake of convenience, as the self-manifestation through history of an Idea of progress, is to be traced back to Plato's teaching concerning the divine purpose for the creation of Godlikeness, and the necessity that human beings, both individually and corporately (but especially corporately), should set themselves in line with this purpose, and co-operate with it in order that the world may become a fitting environment for the creation of Godlikeness.

Four hundred years after this great teaching was launched upon the world, it received the incalculably powerful impetus of Christianity. Christianity brought into the ancient Platonic conception of progress the dynamic of an enthusiastic personal devotion to One who not only summed up in Himself both perfect Godlikeness and perfect humanity, but was in Himself the eternal creative Will for Godlikeness, and was that Will incarnate and suffering for men in order that they might gain the power to follow God's purpose of Godlikeness (which now became Christlikeness). The conception of the Ideal State, as Plato had defined it, had become dull and stale through the attrition of four hundred years ; but the conception of Christ's Kingdom of God was never to become dull and stale, because Christ—the risen, eternal, conquering Christ—was always with His people aiding them by His presence, and enlightening their minds by His Spirit.

Therefore, through the union of these two elements, the Platonic idea of progress and the Christian dynamic, there came into Western

history an undying principle of development towards liberty and co-operation, which no tragedies and no despair have been able to abolish.

A great scholar has declared that "Nothing *moves* in this world which is not Greek in origin." The origin of progress is Platonic; but the dynamic behind progress is Christ.

These things have immense significance for the contact of West upon East, which is by far the most challenging problem, and the most ominous portent, of modern times. We are faced with the task of forming the synthesis between a society which has been built up upon the Platonic-Christian principle of progress, and a society which has had neither Plato nor Christ. At present the contact is being formed blindly, under the coercive influence of superficial factors such as those of political control and economic exploitation. But if the contact is to be formed in a way which will make the world-polity of the future a blessing instead of a disaster—a further development towards freedom and co-operation, instead of a throw-back towards hatred and despotism—it must be formed in the sphere of the mind and of the spirit; for otherwise the essential element behind Western civilization, the Idea of progress, will never be transmitted to the East, but domination and exploitation will form the mode of contact, and the result will be a poisoning both of East and West by the virus of despotism and hatred.

All this means that there is desperate need of a thinker with the courage and the insight of the Fourth Evangelist, who will be able to see what is

the permanent element in the ancient religious witness of India, through which the truth of Christ may not only be interpreted to India in terms which she may understand (though this in itself is an immense undertaking, and one of the utmost significance for the world as a whole), but may be so expressed that India may take hold upon it and develop her own new world-interpretation of Christ. Just as the Greek genius took hold upon Christ, when He was expressed to the Greek world through the teaching of the Logos, and just as the Greek genius re-interpreted Him to all humanity, so (we must believe and aspire) the Indian genius will take hold upon Christ, and re-interpret Him to mankind, if only He is rightly expressed to the Indian world.

From one point of view the conditions under which this new synthesis has to be made are very different from those in which the Logos-synthesis was brought about ; for, quite apart from modern political and economic inter-relations, which heavily weight the scales against Christianity to-day, India has had no Plato, and no Platonic *preparatio evangelica.*

Yet, from another point of view, the conditions are strangely similar ; for in India to-day we have Islam, representing the Semitic assertion of the transcendental sovereignty of the One True God (and though we may not feel that the holiness of God is adequately emphasized in Islam, no Mussulman will acknowledge that this is so) ; and on the other hand, we have Hinduism, representing the ' Aryan ' testimony to the immanence of God, which forms such an important element in

the Platonic idealism ; and though we may be convinced that Platonism and Hinduism differ fundamentally, more especially in regard to the vitally important assertion of the former with regard to the creative Goodness of God and to His working for self-manifestation through God-likeness in humanity, it will be hard to find a Hindu who would not, if challenged, bear eloquent witness to his belief that these elements exist markedly in Hinduism.

Thus Platonism is seen to be Good News for to-day, in the first place because its great assertions are *true*—that God is perfectly good and beautiful, that He is continually working in the world for the creation of His likeness in goodness and beauty, and that in the goodness and beauty around us we may see Him manifested in His true nature. These are truths which grow not old, and of which our modern civilization, which has about it so much that is not beautiful and good, stands urgently in need.

In the second place, Platonism is Good News for to-day, because Christ is for ever the perfect Incarnation of God, and because His Cross is still and always the hope of the world. These things were interpreted to the world through Platonism, which had prepared the mind of humanity marvellously for their reception, by the Platonic idea of God, by the teaching of the Ideal State, and above all by the conception of the Logos. And it is still true that the meaning of Christ may be interpreted to our souls and minds by these great

CHURCH DIVINITY SCHOOL of the PACIFIC

conceptions, which must again become part of the common mental stock of Western humanity.

In the third place, Platonism is Good News for to-day, because Platonism contains the germ of the Idea of progress ; and because the great modern world-problem of the contact of East and West depends for its solution upon our understanding and communicating aright the Idea of progress, which is the root of all advance towards freedom and co-operation.

In the fourth place, Platonism is Good News for to-day, because the synthesis between Semitic and Hellenic thought, which created the Christian system and saved Europe from permanent barbarism, was brought about through the adoption and re-interpretation of a great Platonic conception, that of the divine creative purpose of goodness expressed through the Logos : and because the fashion in which this synthesis was effected may serve as a model for the achievement, under conditions in many ways very similar, of the urgently-needed modern synthesis between Eastern and Western thought. In this connection we study Platonism, the Platonic *preparatio evangelica*, the Platonic-Semitic synthesis in Christ, in order that we may perceive how to study Hinduism (for instance), how to determine what is the Hindu *preparatio evangelica*, and how to form this new synthesis of East and West in Christ.

PART II

THE TEACHINGS OF PLATO

IT is time to turn from the discussion of Platonism in relation to Christianity, and in its aspect as Good News for the modern world, to a consideration of the actual teachings of Plato himself.

If Plato is to be rightly understood he must be studied at length in his marvellous Dialogues; but, though this is so, it is none the less true that of all the world's great writers he lends himself most readily to isolated quotation, and to thought based on such isolated quotation. This is because Plato is really far more of a poet than a philosopher. As we read him, we find embedded, sometimes thickly, sometimes sparsely, in what may be hard and dry material, brilliant gems of thought and truth, which seem to have had their origin in another realm from that of sophisticated and professional philosophy. Plato's poetic (which means creative) insight continually breaks through into a world of æsthetic and spiritual beauty, and expresses what it sees therein in phrases which shine like stars, and upon which attention may be concentrated with zealous and insistent attention.

The detailed and individual study of such sayings—considered not as historical or philo-

sophical curiosities, but as truths of deep moment for ourselves to-day—is a thing of immense profit to the student, and through him, if he studies rightly, to his environment.

Hence we shall choose a number of such sayings, and study them for their modern value, in relation to present-day problems of faith and citizenship.

But first it may be of advantage to take a galaxy of Platonic truths, chosen almost at random from the more important Dialogues, and to set them down side by side, in order that the student of Platonism as Good News for to-day may gain some general conception of the treasures which await him :

" The Idea of the Good is the universal Author of all things beautiful and right, Parent of light, and immediate Source of reason and truth. . . ."

" The true statesman must raise the eye of his soul to the universal Light which lightens all things, and behold the absolute Good. . . ."

" Of all questions that concerning good and evil is the greatest. . . ."

" Look at the City which is Within. . . ."

" In heaven there is laid up a pattern of the City of which we are the founders ; he who desires may behold that pattern, and beholding may take up his abode therein. . . ."

" This must be our notion of the just man, that even when he is in poverty or sickness, or any other seeming misfortune, all things work together for good to him in life and death ; for the gods have a care of anyone whose desire it is to become just and to be like God. . . ."

" Ascend through love and through the transitory objects that are beautiful, towards that which is Beauty itself. . . ."

" The soul, since it is immortal, can have no other refuge from evils, nor safety, except by becoming as good and as wise as possible. . . ."

" God is always to be represented as He truly is. . . . He is truly good, and must be represented as such. . . . The good is to be attributed to God alone : of the evil the cause is to be sought elsewhere. . . ."

" God is perfectly simple and true, both in word and deed. . . ."

" The true lie is hatred. . . ."

" Fashion an image of man that shall be at the same time an image of God. . . ."

" When a beautiful soul harmonises with a beautiful form, and the two are cast in one mould, that will be the fairest of sights to him who has an eye to see it. . . ."

" Our aim in founding the State is not the disproportionate happiness of any one class, but the greatest happiness of the whole. . . ."

" The true statesman should be an earnest worshipper of God, and like Him. . . ."

" He is a fool who seriously inclines to weigh the beautiful by any other standard but that of the good. . . ."

As we read through Jowett's massive and beautiful volumes (the best translation in which to study Plato) we continually come across sayings like these, which seem to lead us at once to the heart of universal and eternal truth.

It will be well that we should now take a number of such sayings, arrange them roughly under headings, and study them for the Good News which they bear for our own day, and for the foreshadowing which they show of the things of Christ.

THE DIVINE PURPOSE IN CREATION

I. *Let me tell you then why the Creator made the world. . . . He was good, and the good can never have any jealousy of anything. And being free from jealousy, He desired that all things should be as like Himself as they could be.*[1]

This immensely important passage sums up the Platonic teaching on the divine activity in creation. That teaching is as fresh and modern —and as deeply needed—to-day as ever it was.

The purpose of God in bringing the universe into existence was the manifestation of Himself as He is, that is, as beauty and goodness. He fashioned the worlds that they might show forth beauty and goodness, which are His own nature. Beauty we may see in nature, and in the vast systems of the stellar universe. But goodness is essentially an element of human personality : or rather (to speak Platonically—and also Christianly), personality is the vehicle of the divine self-manifestation as goodness, and therefore mankind is the highest handiwork of God, because only through mankind can the divine nature of goodness be reproduced in the world.

[1] *Timaeus*, 29.

God's purpose in creation comes to fruition exactly in so far as individual men become genuinely beautiful and good in their souls, and in so far as the corporate relationships of mankind are governed by God's will of goodness.

This means, for the Christian, that the purpose of creation comes to fruition as individual men become Christlike, and as Christ's ideals of the Kingdom of God are realized.

Apart from these deep and marvellous ideas, the above-quoted passage from the *Timaeus* is of deep interest as containing a kind of negative formulation of the distinctively Christian teaching that God is Love. Plato tells us that God has no jealousy at all in His nature, and that He is *therefore* desirous that His likeness should be created in the world, through the spreading abroad of beauty and goodness. Where we have the conception of a Godhead entirely generous, and striving for fellowship with beings made capable of fellowship with Himself through their spiritual likeness to Himself, i.e. through the sharing of His nature, it is clear that we are within a very short distance of a definite formulation of the Christian truth that God is Love, and that He is redemptive Love, which sticks at nothing in the endeavour to save men from all that holds them back from fellowship with God through likeness to Him.

Plato had prepared the way in a marvellous fashion for the full truth. He had come within an ace of the Vision of the Love of God ; and when that full Vision did come, through Christ, men's hearts were found to have been prepared through Plato to receive it.

II. *This is in the truest sense the origin of creation and of the world, as we shall do well in believing on the testimony of wise men: God desired that all things should be good and nothing bad.*[1]

This belief springs directly from the Platonic teaching that God is the universal Idea of Goodness, whose will and purpose is the creation of the likeness of Himself under the conditions of materiality. The universe came into existence that God might manifest His goodness, through the creation, above all else, of souls that are like Him in goodness.

Unfortunately, as the conception is expressed in the *Timaeus*, it is bound up with a dualism which is set forth in a way that appears to us to-day grotesque; for we are asked to believe in subsidiary and fallible creator-spirits—Demiougoi—as responsible for the mistakes and cruelties of the conditions under which life now exists in the world.

But these obvious weaknesses in the deductions which Plato drew in the *Timaeus* from his great belief in the goodness of God and in His will that all things may be like Himself, must not blind our eyes to the supreme truth enunciated, and enunciated for all time, in the teaching concerning this divine activity in creation.

Nowadays we are able to recognize in evil the relics of the lower past from which our race has climbed. We can even think of it as the raw material from which, or rather in redemptive conquest of which, men are enabled, through Christ, to become Christlike and Godlike.

[1] *Timaeus*, 30.

But we still need Plato's stalwart assertion that under no circumstances at all is God to be regarded as the Author of evil, or of anything but good. This conception is both implicit and explicit in Christ's teaching of God as the perfect Father, and as Love. But we are disastrously liable to forget it ; and Plato's outspoken definiteness on the point makes his message again Good News for to-day. Mankind needs all the assistance which it can obtain from any source in the eternal fight against the conception of God as a Despot meting out good and evil indiscriminately and capriciously to his subjects.

III. *The truth is that God is never in any way unrighteous—He is perfect righteousness ; and he of us who is the most righteous is most like Him.*[1]

This is an utterance—in the highest sense a prophetic utterance—which should be engraved in letters of gold in every place throughout the earth where the attempt is made to worship God. We are *never* to allow ourselves to think of God as anything but entirely good, entirely beneficent, entirely loving. We are to realize that to think of Him in any other way is not only blasphemy, but leads straight to disaster, through the lowering of our moral ideals about human life also. For, as the second part of this great utterance insists, the building up in a human life of the likeness of God —which is the fulfilment in that life of the divine purpose and will, and the creative working

[1] *Theaetetus*, 176.

through that life of the divine enterprise for the bringing into existence of an ideal State which shall be a true Kingdom of God amongst men—can only come as we become genuinely good, genuinely Christlike (as we know now it should be worded) in patience, humility, purity, love.

Wherever we see anyone of whom we can say, "That is a genuinely good, a genuinely Christlike, man," we see a manifestation of the divine nature, a shining of the eternal Idea of Goodness through the mists of materiality.

But if we have low and unworthy ideas about God, thinking of Him as vindictive, capricious or tyrannical, we shall inevitably have unworthy ideals for mankind also.

IV. *We ought to fly away from earth to heaven, as quickly as we can; and to fly away is to become like God, as far as this is possible; and to become like Him is to become holy, just and wise.*[1]

In this noble summing-up of Plato's philosophy of life we see that Heaven, the ideal realm, where we may abide in fellowship with divine reality, is here amongst us. It is the inward state of those who are like God in their character. We are to become perfect even as He is perfect. We exist in this world that His perfection may shine through us, and be manifested in our lives to other men. We are to become centres of Godlikeness, through whom God's own nature and being of goodness

[1] *Theaetetus*, 176.

may work as leaven in the world. We are to be creative outposts of Heaven.

It is a high, and an unattainable, ideal. The more we contemplate it, the more utterly and completely we are convinced of our inability even to begin to put it into practical realization ; and the more black and evil does our failure to do so appear.

But we must go forward in our thought, and remember the enabling power which Jesus Christ brought into the world through His Cross. He held the same ideal : " Be ye therefore perfect, merciful, loving, even as your Father which is in heaven." And to a weary world, which had seen but could not attain, He brought the power, without which all was futility.

V. *Looking now at the world and all the animals and plants, at things which grow upon the earth from seeds and roots, as well as at inanimate substances which are formed within the earth, fusile or non-fusile, shall we say that they came into existence—not having existed previously—by the creation of God, or shall we agree with vulgar opinion about them . . . that nature brings them into being from some spontaneous and unintelligent cause ? . . . They are created by a divine reason and a knowledge which comes from God.*[1]

This passage is one of the roots of the Logos doctrine. Plato is convinced that the world has been brought into existence by no fortuitous working of natural laws, but by the operation of

[1] *Sophist*, 265.

'a divine reason and a knowledge which comes from God.' In the *Timaeus* [1] he says: *The world has been framed in the likeness of that which is apprehended by reason and mind;* and again:[2] *The world became a living creature truly endowed with soul and intelligence by the providence of God.* These latter passages emphasize the rational character of the universe—the fact not merely that it is built on a reasonable plan and that there is a *rationale* of its make-up, but that a rational principle, living and operative, indwells and sustains it. The passage from the *Sophist*, quoted above, shows that this rational principle, this Logos, is to be conceived of as the agency of creation.

The Logos is therefore to be conceived of as an eternal element in the Godhead—the eternal means through which the divine Will for the manifestation under material conditions of the divine nature of beauty and goodness finds its fulfilment in the world.

The *preparatio evangelica* in these conceptions is obvious.

VI. *The Ruler of the universe has ordered all things with a view to the excellence and preservation of the whole, and each part, as far as may be, has an action . . . appropriate to it. . . . This and every other creation is for the sake of the whole, and in order that the life of the whole may be blessed. . . . You are created for the sake of the whole, and not the whole for the sake of you.*[3]

[1] 29. [2] 30. [3] *Laws*, 903.

There is to be found in these words a store of deep and reasoned faith in the universal creative and controlling power of God, working in the universe for the great ends of goodness and love. Not only so, but there is also high teaching regarding the necessity for each human being to bring himself into line with this eternal purpose, and to subordinate himself to the divine Will of love, which demands that we should look on the universe not as a treasure-house from which we may seize as much as possible for ourselves, but as a cause which calls for life-long self-giving in the service of God's Kingdom.

We are created to serve ends beyond ourselves, to co-operate with God in an eternal purpose of goodness and love.

VII. *That is the Highest of which you now know nothing—to know the gods rightly, and to live accordingly.*[1]

Although in this work of his old age, the *Laws*, Plato reverts from time to time to the old polytheistic terminology (not, it would strongly appear, as a result of any change in his opinions, but possibly because of an old man's conservatism, or because of the type of audience which he was addressing), the heart of his teaching is still the same as in the epoch of his highest artistic skill and prophetic insight—the epoch of the *Gorgias*, the *Symposium*, the *Timaeus*, the *Phaedo*, the *Phaedrus*, the *Apology*, the *Republic*.

[1] *Laws*, 888.

The only vocation of man which is worth calling a vocation at all is to learn to think rightly about God—to know Him for what He is, in His beauty and goodness—and then to mould one's life upon that Vision, striving with all the powers of body, mind and soul to become like God, that one may fulfil in one's own little sphere God's eternal Will of self-manifestation through the creation of God-likeness in the world.

It is a truth which can never grow old, and which is as fresh, as joyful, as potent for transformation and regeneration, to-day as ever it was. Above all, it is a truth behind which we have the power of the Living Christ, through Whom we know—with a knowledge which, if we are true Christians, bears fruit automatically in Christlike action—that God's heart is a Father-heart of love, and that by love we may become like Him.

THE MEANING OF THE WORLD

1. *All philosophers assert with one voice that mind is the king of heaven and earth. The universe . . . is ordered and governed by a marvellous intelligence and wisdom . . . The assertion that mind orders all things is worthy of the subject of the world, and of the sun, and of the moon, and of the stars, and of the whole circle of heaven; and never will I say or think otherwise.*[1]

Plato is perfectly convinced that the whole universe is ruled by creative Mind, working out its purpose—the manifestation of its own divine beauty and goodness—through the whole great

[1] *Philebus*, 28.

system. Especially as he looks upon the starry heavens is this greatest of all philosophers impressed by this truth. He cannot behold the majestic harmony of sun, moon and stars without testifying to his conviction that a universal creative Mind is responsible for and sustains the whole.

Hence Plato's outlook upon the world and all in it is above all else theocentric. God is to him the one fundamental and indubitable Fact.

THE LOVE OF GOD

I. God is good, and is the Giver of all good things to mankind : this conviction rings through the writings of Plato, making them incurably theocentric. In the *Euthyphro* the idea is expressed in the old polytheistic phraseology—"*There is no doubt about what the gods give to us ; for there is no good thing which they do not give*," [1] whereas in the *Republic* and other Dialogues this has given way to a monotheistic manner of expression. But the truth which is struggling for interpretation in the mind of Plato is the same ; and it is a truth which was later to reach its sovereign and perfect expression in the great words of Christ about the absolute certainty that if we, who are anything but perfectly good, can show true love to our children, then God, Who is perfectly good, must show to His children—that is, to ourselves—a far deeper and fuller love.

Plato has reached the joyful realization that the

[1] *Euthyphro*, 15.

divine attitude towards humanity is fundamentally beneficent: that the universe is at heart kindly. Such a belief is not far from the Christian faith in God as Love, and is clearly a most important preparation for it.

II. *Socrates*: There is only one point in which I have an advantage over you.
Alcibiades: What is that?
Socrates: I have a Guardian who is better and wiser than your guardian, Pericles.
Alcibiades: Who is he, Socrates?
Socrates: God, Alcibiades.[1]

There is here a good illustration of the God-consciousness of Socrates, which he communicated so effectually to his pupil, Plato. He is continually aware of the divine guidance and care, even though the manner in which he speaks of these things seems to us at times strange. He goes through life relying upon an inner voice of divine guidance; and as he obeys that voice, he finds it leading him into happiness, usefulness and certainty, and knows that he is following the divine will with faithful obedience.

God is to him a constant Guide and Stay, a Guardian who will never leave him, but will keep him continually in His care, watching over him, saving him from mistakes and wrong-doing, shepherding him along the path in which he should tread, and through which he may most

[1] *Alcibiades*, I, 124.

effectively serve the divine purpose of goodness and beauty in the world.

III. *The temperate man is the friend of God, for he is like Him.*[1]

This is another striking evidence of Plato's insight into spiritual truth. God has friends amongst men : and the friends of God are not those who have attained to specially marked prosperity or honour, nor are they capriciously chosen favourites marked out by an inscrutable destiny for salvation ; but they are simply those through whom the divine goodness, beauty and love shine clearly.

Amongst the Greeks ' temperance,' which meant much more than we mean by ' self-control,' was regarded as the highest crown of all virtue. From beginning to end of his work Plato, possessed as he was by an undying passion to find out the real nature of goodness, devoted a great deal of labour to the endeavour to discover an adequate definition for ' temperance.' One of his earliest Dialogues, the *Charmides*, is devoted to this subject alone ; and at the end of his life, in the *Laws*, he reaches the conclusion that ' temperance ' is the ' ground or accompaniment of all virtue.'

Therefore in declaring that the temperate man is the friend of God, Plato means that the friendship and love of God will be most signally imparted to him who is most genuinely good in all the elements of his nature. He is the man who has most successfully shown forth the divine being, and

[1] *Laws*, 716.

fulfilled the divine Will; and the friendship of God is his reward.

This great saying clearly has a definite bearing upon the question whether or no Plato has any definite conception of God as Love. If he can speak of God being the Friend of those who are like Him, it is evident that he has reached some measure at least of vision upon the master-truth of God's love.

IV. *In his relations with strangers a man should consider that a contract is a most holy thing, and that all concerns and wrongs of strangers are more directly dependent on the protection of God than wrongs done to citizens.*[1]

In this formulation of the Greek conviction that Heaven is especially tender and gracious towards helpless and defenceless suppliants—a conviction of which striking use is made in Greek tragedy—we may see breaking into the world, and here expressed clearly and definitely, the great truth that God is nearest to us, and most eager and potent to help us, just when we need Him most.

It is a truth which every believer in God has proved for himself a thousand times over in practical experience. And it is a truth which is powerfully brought home to us when we consider divine things, as Christ taught us to do, in the light cast on them by the best and highest human relationships.

For when our children are ill or lonely, or in some other way especially needing our help, do

[1] *Laws*, 730.

not we human parents see to it that we are then closest to them, and most carefully attentive to their needs?

V. *Are not the gods the chiefest of all guardians, and do they not guard our highest interests; and shall we say that those who guard our noblest interests, and are the best of guardians, are inferior in virtue to dogs, and to men even of moderate excellence, who would never betray justice for the sake of gifts which unjust men impiously offer them?* [1]

In spite of the polytheistic guise in which it is cast—and which is probably an evidence of returning conservatism in the ageing mind of the teacher—this passage is of wide-reaching importance, as definitely establishing the standard that, in thinking of God, we must always attribute to Him a goodness *at least* as complete as that of the best of men. Having begun there, we shall of course go on to affirm that God must be infinitely better than the best of men.

It is, in effect, the standard set up by Christ when He spoke of a human father giving food to his children, and God therefore giving all good gifts to His children.

The implications of this teaching in its bearing on a living faith in God we have scarcely begun to comprehend as yet. We must learn to look out on the best there is in humanity in all manner of relationships, above all in those of parenthood, and continually remind ourselves that God is better than the best we see.

[1] *Laws*, 907.

Plato in this passage gives us conclusively the negative side of this vastly important and as yet almost entirely neglected teaching about God. We must never think of God as in any way worse than a man. Christ gives us the final positive presentation of the same truth when He tells us that God is our Father—a Father like the father of the Prodigal Son, a Father better and tenderer and more wisely loving than the best and tenderest and most wisely loving human father we can ever imagine.

THE WILL OF GOD

I. At the heart of the Platonic conception of the meaning of man's life in the world is this great principle :

Every man ought to make up his mind that he will be one of the followers of God.[1]

God is One. He is Sovereign Will working for the creation in the world of likeness to Himself. Therefore every human being, if his life is to mean anything at all, must realize that the meaning of his life is only to be found in setting himself and his own individual will in line with this divine will, and in so living that he may carry out the divine purpose of Godlikeness in his own particular case—in the narrow limits of his own soul, and in the environment wherein he is set (as Christians we know that Christlikeness of soul is only to be attained as a man forgets his own soul and concentrates all his efforts upon the

[1] *Laws*, 716.

working of the divine will of redemption in his environment).

This conception of the chief, and indeed only, end of man's life as the following of the divine Will has become so familiar to us in Christianity as to appear the most ordinary of commonplaces ; but none the less the service done to mankind by Plato in setting this truth at the centre of his whole system of thought was of the most crucial importance both in preparing the way for Christ and in launching the idea of progress into the world.

II. *God ought to be to us the measure of all things, and not man, as men commonly say : the words are far more true of Him.*[1]

The old maxim of Protagoras, with its glorification of humanity, leads us nowhere. There is no seed of progress in the conception that man—which must mean man as he actually is in any given age—is the standard by which everything else is to be measured and evaluated. For if man is the measure of all things, man is content to remain static and self-satisfied, congratulating himself with a fatuous vanity that he is the centre of all his universe.

But if God, Who is goodness and beauty so pure and absolute that only here and there can His true nature peep through human lives in self-manifestation in the world around us : if this God is the measure of all things, the standard and ideal by which all achievement and all character is to be judged : if this God is the goal ahead of us, and a

[1] *Laws*, 716.

goal which yet indwells us as an ever-working Will for Godlikeness : if God is this, then our race is for ever driven upward and onward towards God, and progress is seen to be the only meaning which there is in life.

God is the measure of all things, because God is the Ideal after which we strive, and because that Ideal is a creative Spirit—the Inward Christ (as we now have learnt to call Him)—for ever inspiring and moulding our souls and lives towards Godlikeness ; for this is the divine Will which creates and sustains the universe, that God should be manifested as He is through the highest of all His handiwork, the soul of man.

THE IDEA OF BEAUTY

I. In the thought of Plato the Idea of Beauty is the brightest and most adorable aspect of heavenly reality, and therefore (for in his deepest thought this great seer personifies the Ideal Beauty as God) the most fundamental attribute of the Godhead.

This Idea of Beauty is to be manifested—to shine through—human life, which exists in order that it may reproduce the likeness of God. This is the reason why the great prayer of Socrates is : "*Grant me to be beautiful in the inner man.*" [1] He whose outward appearance was grotesque and laughable knew that the inner beauty of the soul is attainable by every spirit which truly hungers and thirsts after that beauty. Therefore he made

[1] *Phaedrus*, 279.

it his prayer that he might manifest the divine beauty in his soul; and he knew well that a beautiful soul is to be seen and recognized in a beautiful life and a beautiful character.

Plato saw clearly the possibility of the soul's becoming modelled and moulded on the divine Exemplar, so that the whole being of the man who is truly devoted to goodness and truth becomes a manifestation of the splendour of God, a setting forth of his likeness amongst men. If the earnest aspiration of a man's heart is to see the Eternal Beauty, the vision will be granted him, and having once seen the vision he will be led to desire above all else a true soul-likeness to what he has seen.

For the great Ideas of Goodness, Beauty and Truth are dynamic principles, which—if only we will give them entrance to our hearts—are powerful to reproduce their likeness therein, and to work through us for the transforming of the world.

This thought of the ancient Greek philosopher is still fresh and young, for it has in it the very stuff of eternal truth. We Christians do not speak much of the divine Ideas, and yet—especially when Plato shows that he thinks of God as the personification of these Ideas—we must recognize that Platonic thought is very close to our own, and is marked by extraordinary clarity and beauty. The Ideas are to us the ever-working creative Will of the God who is Love, and who is ever striving to create the likeness of Himself through love in the world and in the lives of men. That Will is perfectly summed up in Christ, in whom Goodness, Beauty and Truth are

fully and faultlessly manifested. Thus for us the aspiration must be that we may become like unto Christ.

We shall still pray the same prayer as Socrates, the prayer for beauty in the inner man. But we shall have a clearer conception of what that beauty means when thought of as indwelling and driving a human life. We shall know that it is likeness to Christ. And so our prayer will be the prayer that God's Will of love may be done in us through the creation in our souls of a humility, a simplicity, a self-sacrificing love like those which made the character of Christ. We shall pray, as Paul prayed, that in our mortal bodies Christ may be formed.

To us the Ideas are still the dazzlingly beautiful existences of which Plato spoke. They are still indwelling the world, and manifesting themselves through its mortal inhabitants. They are still to be seen and adored by any soul which truly desires to apprehend reality. But their meaning is made eternally plain to us, and comprehensible to the dullest intellect on earth, whilst their beauty and winsomeness is immeasurably increased, because we know them to be Christ.

II. *Ascend, through . . . Love, (and) through the transitory objects which are beautiful, towards that which is Beauty itself.*[1]

To Plato love is not only the thirst for continual fellowship with the Good, with the Idea of Goodness, with God Himself: it is not only the desire

[1] *Symposium*, 211.

for immortality, and its fulfilment in the attainment of immortality. It is also the means of contact between our individual souls and the perfect universal Beauty. Love is the pathway to God, to immortality, and to experience and attainment of the supremely and eternally beautiful.

There is here an element in the Platonic thought which is profoundly un-Semitic, un-Jewish. The Jews, or rather the greatest prophets amongst the Jews, were pioneers in the realm of righteousness, but neither they nor their heirs in the period of Puritanism had much conception of the significance of beauty. Christ, on the other hand, had a vivid consciousness of the sovereign value of beauty, as we see from his constant references to beauty in nature, in childhood, in home-life. His 'artistic temperament,' if the phrase may be permitted, was by no means a minor cause of the failure of his fellow-countrymen to appreciate and understand him, as may be seen from an incident like that in the house of Simon the Pharisee, when Christ's appreciation of the beauty of loving generosity in the repentant sinner brought Him actively into disfavour with the prim and sanctimonious representatives of current respectability. Humanly speaking, it was utterly impossible that anyone with a vision of beauty in nature, in human character, in the simple relationships of everyday life, and above all in God, such as that possessed by Jesus Christ should have been appreciated by Pharisaic Judaism.

But with the Greeks it was different. The Greeks had always been possessed by a conviction

of the supreme significance of beauty. Plato, the greatest of their prophets, lifted this conception to the highest plane in his teaching concerning the identity of beauty and goodness, and in his assertion that God is both goodness and beauty. For four hundred years these great teachings did their work upon the Greek mind ; and thus the way was prepared for the acceptance of an aspect of Christianity which the Jews could never have understood or rightly valued. The way was prepared for Christian art and Christian architecture, for the vivid beauty shown, for instance, in many of the Christian epitaphs in the catacombs, for the mosaics of Ravenna, for St. Sophia, for Gothic cathedrals, for the music of Palestrina or Handel, for the age-long witness to divine beauty which is embodied in Christian hymnology, for the poetry of Dante, of Milton, of Wordsworth.

It is true, of course, that Christianity, under another aspect, has been marked, all the way on through the centuries, by asceticisms and puritanisms, which have shrunk in horror from all beauty, and have even done their best to destroy it. Yet this dark element must not conceal from us the other element, which has found in Christ the perfect beauty fulfilling and giving their meaning to all lesser forms of beauty. For the fact that this element of light and loveliness was enabled to develop, and to show forth the joyful and beautiful side of religion and the supreme beauty of God, we must give the main thanks to Plato and to his insistence that God, who is the Idea of Beauty as well as the Idea of Goodness, is the only worthy object of man's yearning and desire.

III. At the heart of the Platonic message on ultimate truth is the emphasis which is laid by that message upon the Beauty of God. Other great religious teachers have taught that God is holy, and that God is final reality; but Plato, as the supreme spokesman of the Greek religious genius, sums up and authoritatively interprets the witness of that religious genius in a pronouncement which is unique, the pronouncement that God is supremely Beautiful.

This conviction regarding the Beauty of God, when combined with Plato's conception of the divine creative activity as being eternally engaged in the task of creating the likeness of God, leads him to declare that the world as a whole, and above all the human beings in the world, must be made beautiful, with a beauty which is identical with the highest goodness, just as the highest goodness is identical with it. *When a beautiful soul harmonizes with a beautiful form, and the two are cast in one mould, that will be the fairest of sights to him who has an eye to see it.*[1] In other words, the fulfilment of the divine will for man is that beauty and goodness should live and grow side by side in human souls, kindling therein the genuine likeness of God.

Outward beauty is in itself the manifestation of the Idea of Beauty. It is the reflection of the thought of God; and that thought is eternal and perfect. Therefore, though the fair form may become hideous, and may perish, nothing to all eternity can alter the fact that at one point of time that minute fraction of materiality did show forth

[1] *Republic*, 402.

the divine Idea. Similarly with goodness—and love is the supreme form of goodness, as we Christians know—wherever true goodness, true love, has shone forth in human character, nothing to all eternity can alter the fact that it has so shone forth, embodying in its existence the fulfilment, even though it was a brief fulfilment, of the divine purpose in creation.

It is of course grievous that these things should not be permanent, that beauty of form is fated, however perfect it may seem, to decay into corruption, and that beauty of character and richness of love may change and become less full and perfect But this fact of impermanence, which is intimately bound up with all existence on this earth, must not hide from our eyes the other and deeper fact that such beauty and love has existed, and in so existing—even if it was for only a short time—has formed a true fulfilment of the Will of God.

Beauty of outward form, whether seen in a mountain or in a sunset, in a picture or in a human face, is mark and proof, offered with a singular brilliance and appeal, so that every one seeing it must confess its existence, that the divine Will has succeeded to that extent in its eternal task of organizing materiality into a manifestation of the Idea of Beauty and a genuine likeness to God Himself.

There are psychologists to-day who explain beauty in the terms of usefulness, and even in terms of survival-value. But, apart from the fact that no such theory can explain the beauty of an angry sea or a snow-clad mountain-peak, such an attitude of mind must appear to anyone who has

formed any conception of Platonic thought a grotesque burying of the head away from patent reality. For the Platonist knows that Beauty is a thought of God, a flash of the divine Will breaking through this hard medium of materiality, from which that Will is continually striving to fashion the image of God. He knows that it marks, though perhaps only for a single moment, the success of the divine enterprise ; because God also is beautiful.

And yet beauty of outward form can never be enough, because God is good and loving. He is so because He is beautiful, and He is beautiful because He is good and loving. For Beauty and Goodness are one.

IV. *Beauty depends on simplicity—I mean the true simplicity of a rightly and nobly ordered mind and character.*[1]

He is a fool who seriously inclines to weigh the beautiful by any other standard but that of the good.[2]

The good is the beautiful.[3]

Beauty and Goodness are to be identified ; for Beauty is only to be estimated as such inasmuch as it satisfies the criterion of goodness. There can be no true beauty without goodness, and (though this we are sometimes apt to forget) no true goodness without, somewhere or other, beauty. These are to Plato the sovereign Ideas ; and to him the soul is immortal simply because it can in measure comprehend these Ideas and bear with it through the world the ' recollection ' of them, which means the permanent faculty of recognizing and appreciating these Ideas as they are manifested around

[1] *Republic*, 400. [2] *Republic*, 452. [3] *Lysis*, 216.

us, and of experiencing in inward communion their reality and greatness.

To Christ also goodness was beauty and beauty goodness in the perfect love of God, wherein all beauty, all joy, all goodness were summed up. To Him also the soul was immortal because it has within it the capacity for experiencing this divine love. "He is not the God of the dead, but of the living." The capacity for the friendship of God, which is possessed by the human soul, is in itself the proof of immortality. The love of God is immortality itself, here and now enjoyed and lived in by the soul.

It is obvious how close is the connection between these two realms of thought and faith. It is obvious also how efficient was the Platonic Theory of Ideas as a means of preparing the old classical world for the full truth in Christ. Goodness—we should say love—is the highest and brightest and best of all ultimate and eternal reality. God is Himself goodness. The soul may partake of the very nature of God, experiencing Him and communing with Him in a spiritual sharing of His nature, friendship and will, and thereby stepping clear of the realm of death. These great truths, perfectly shown forth in Christ, are already heralded by Plato.

V. To Plato, who testified with such deep conviction to the fact that God is Beauty, the divine Beauty was also Goodness. The realization of this truth led him—in spite of his keen æsthetic delight in the noble and lovely side of literature

and tradition—to declaim with fiercely-concentrated energy against the unworthiness of much that passed as religious history in his day. Homer was to be excluded from the Ideal State, because he taught low ideas about God ; and with Homer a great mass of material from the ancient mythology must go also.

For instance, *If Asclepius was the son of a god, we maintain that he was not avaricious : or, if he was avaricious, he was not the son of a god* [1]—the situation could not be expressed more concretely and directly. Plato deliberately sets up a new standard by which to judge ideas and stories about God. It is the standard of righteousness. If the so-called god does not attain to that standard, then one of two things must be true about him, either his words and actions have been incorrectly reported to us, or else his claim to divinity is patently ill-founded.

Plato's attitude with regard to these things is amazingly modern. It is also amazingly constructive, or rather creative. The claim cannot be made even for our present generation that it has attained to the enthusiasm for truth, the intense interest in God, and the passion for righteousness, which alone could make it comprehend and accept Plato's marvellous standard in these things. Before we can perceive the true and deathless value of what he did in this respect, we must be possessed by his own hunger and thirst after beauty, after righteousness, after truth, and we must feel, as he felt, that this hunger and thirst can only be assuaged in the knowledge of God.

If we think meanly of the Divine, in any sense or

[1] *Republic*, 408.

relation : if we believe mean stories about the Divine—accounts of God's motives and methods of working which depict Him as less good than the very highest and noblest we have ever known or heard of in humanity—then our souls are clouded and deluded, and there can be no chance of our thinking aright concerning the divine will and the divine purpose in creation.

It is needful therefore that from time to time we should go carefully through our stock of ideas about the Divine, and remorselessly strip out from amongst them anything which would place God in a lower position as regards character and motive than the best and noblest man of whom we have ever heard. We need not perform this process of expurgation with any ostentatious bitterness. We shall remember with what regretful courtesy Homer was to be bowed out of Plato's *Republic*. But none the less we shall realize that this is the one sphere in human life wherein there can be no compromise, no polite evasions, no refusal to face and deal with unpleasant facts.

But where may we find the criterion whereby to estimate the truth or falsity of current ideas about God? This is a question which is easily answered by the believing Christian. The criterion of Godhead is Christ. If there exists in the thought of God held by the men around us anything in the least un-Christlike, then we can exclaim at once, and with the most intense conviction, " That is a lie ; for that is not like Christ ; and Christ is to us the express image of the invisible Godhead."

For instance, it is utterly impossible that God should be ' jealous,' that He should be vindictive

and bloodthirsty (as He is represented in the affair of Agag), that he should be violent or capricious. It is utterly impossible that He should enjoy dashing the cup of happiness from men's lips (as is often supposed) on account of past transgressions. There *must* be something wrong with the records in such cases, or with our understanding of them. For God is Christlike.

Thus the principle laid down with such power by Plato, so long ago, is still valid ; and its application is infinitely reinforced, and rendered infinitely easier, by our knowledge of God in Christ.

THE IDEA OF GOODNESS

I. *The Idea of the Good is the universal Author of all things beautiful and right, Parent of light . . . and the immediate Source of reason and truth.*[1]

This is perhaps the most striking of all the passages which show that in reality Plato identified the Idea of the Good with God—that in his moments of deepest insight he thought and spoke of It as personal, both as the Creator of the universe and as the indwelling immanent God who by His unceasing working is gradually transforming all things into likeness to Himself.

Plato is convinced, beyond all shadow of doubt, that God is entirely good, and must never be conceived of as the author of anything evil or ugly : above all that He is the Creator of all beauty and goodness, because He is Himself ineffably beau-

[1] *Republic*, 517.

tiful and good. God shines through all things in this world which have in them any element of beauty and goodness, and in looking at such things we are in reality looking at Him, and learning to recognize Him more and more. We are practising that fellowship with ideal Beauty and Goodness which we enjoyed in the heavenly sphere before our birth into this world.

But this is not all. God is Beauty and Goodness, but He is Truth also. He is Himself the origin and ground of all right thinking, which is in essence the re-thinking of His thoughts. He is the Reason which upholds the worlds in one consistent system.

This last conception has had immense significance as a *preparatio evangelica*, for it lies at the root of the great Logos doctrine, which was seized upon by the inspired genius of the Fourth Evangelist, in the form which it had assumed in the teaching of the great Alexandrian Jew Philo, and was made the basis of the synthesis between Christianity and Hellenism (or rather perhaps between Christianity and Platonism as interpreted by the Stoics and other heirs of the Platonic tradition). That synthesis rendered it possible for us to be Christians to-day.

II. *The good is to be attributed to God alone; of the evil the cause is to be sought elsewhere. . . . That God, being good, is the author of evil to anyone is to be strenuously denied, and is not to be said or sung or heard in verse or prose by anyone whether young or old.*[1]

[1] *Republic*, 380.

Even yet we have hardly attained to this thought that God is not the author of evil to anyone. Twenty-three hundred years and more have passed since Plato enunciated this great truth, and still we allow conceptions of Oriental despotism to affect our thinking about God. We dislike to limit—as it seems to us in our folly—His omnipotence by supposing that He really *cannot* do anything, for example that He cannot punish sinners vindictively, or that He cannot be anything except perfect love towards His children. We are shy and hesitating in our thought about God's nature. We are diffident, sometimes very diffident, about daring to acknowledge that He is really and in practice perfectly and entirely good. We like, in a canny judicious spirit, to reserve a little at least of totally arbitrary power for Him.

All this means that we still need to go to school to Plato, and to learn from him that God can *never*, by any possible stretch of imagination, be anything except perfectly good and loving. He can *never* do any harm to anyone. If we believe in Hell, for instance, we have got (if possible) to reconcile the conception of Hell with this conception of the complete goodness of God. We have got to believe that Hell is really and permanently good for the people who are sent there, and that God sends them there for their good, which means their improvement, in accordance with His will of perfect love.

Most of all, in our thought about God and ourselves we have to realize that *everything* that has happened to us in the past, and everything that can possibly happen to us in the future, is sent by

a God who perfectly loves us for our good. It is an almost paralysing notion ; but if only we can once grasp it, it will turn the world for us into a totally new place.

III. Plato is in love with goodness. He desires and yearns for goodness. He hungers and thirsts after righteousness. He is never tired of insisting that no question in heaven or earth will ever be settled aright till we come to know what the good really is, to desire and follow it with our whole souls, and to hate evil with a perfect hatred.

To Plato the universe exists that good may be made manifest ; for this is the will of God. Creation is God's own process, whereby He sets goodness in motion, that it may be concretely and visibly expressed under the conditions of time and space, in lives that are manifestations of the divine goodness.

Therefore Plato declares, *Of all questions this concerning good and evil is the greatest.*[1] It is the greatest because we cannot understand aright the nature of God, the meaning of ideal reality, the purpose of man's life, until we understand what is good and what evil.

Hence we find that the greater part, and the more important part, of Plato's work is concerned with a painstaking and conscientious inquiry, undertaken from a great number of different points of view, into the real nature of right and wrong. His primary task is the establishment of ethical standards, whereby God and man and the State may be adjudged. When he

[1] *Republic*, 578.

has discovered his standards, he applies them ruthlessly. No conception of God is to be tolerated which fails to accord with the standards of goodness thus set up. No reputation for wisdom or virtue is to stand which does not ring true when tested in this way. No political organization and no educational system is to be permitted which does not make for the creation of such goodness.

The Christian, who looks at Christ as his concrete and personal Standard of goodness, will hail with deep respect and joy this whole-hearted enthusiasm for what is in anticipation the nature of the Christlike God.

IV. Plato is convinced that within each one of us there dwells an ideal man. He may be hidden and suppressed, but he is there ; and our lives will only find their true meaning and fulfilment as we let him show himself freely in our everyday action, and so give him power to realize himself fully within us.

Ever so speak and act as to give the man within . . . the most complete mastery over the entire human creature.[1]

In this conception of the ideal man indwelling each human soul there are the roots of the idea of progress. For every one of us the whole of life must be a continual striving after the fulfilment of this ideal manhood. There can be no standing still. We either go on from height to height, or we sink backwards towards the beast. We either allow our powers of Godlikeness to atrophy, or we attack the rough marble of our nature, as Michel

[1] *Republic*, 589.

Angelo attacked the raw material of his masterpieces, stripping layer after layer of concealment from the ideal figure hidden within.

As Christians we think of this ideal man within the soul as the Christ Within, the indwelling Spirit who is striving to shake Himself free into effective Christlikeness in every human heart. The creative effort to realize God's Idea in man, which we are called upon to aid, both in ourselves and in others, is for us concrete and definite. It is the endeavour to reconstruct the personal character which shall be as like as possible to the personal character of Christ. Our existence is an unceasing striving towards this ideal, towards Christ, who is not merely an external and transcendental Example, not merely a Saviour far distant from us in heaven, but an indwelling, energizing, self-propagating, personal Spirit, working within us as a Personality for the creation of personality like that of Christ.

V. In the opinion of Plato there is only one thing which is worthy of consideration in all questions of human conduct. We must ask, "Is a thing *right*, is a given course of action *right*, when viewed in relation to the eternal standards, to the Ideas of goodness, beauty and truth?"

Pleasure, like everything else, is to be sought for the sake of that which is good, and not that which is good for the sake of pleasure.[1]

No course of action is to be chosen for selfish reasons—because it may lead to money or fame or

[1] *Gorgias*, 500.

(above all) pleasure. Everything is to be regarded in the light of the eternal standards of right and wrong. Here is an obvious foreshadowing of Christ's vivid and effectual teaching concerning the necessity for men to adopt the will of a perfectly good and perfectly loving God as their final and absolute standard in all problems of conduct. The revelation of that God in Christ Himself, who perfectly carried out God's Will and showed forth His character, forms for the Christian the ultimate standard of which Plato spoke and taught.

It is a standard plain to be seen, and easy to apply ; for it is personal. It is the Living Christ. The Christian goes through life as convinced as ever Plato can have been that all other considerations are to give way before the consideration of what is right ; but he is equipped with an immeasurable advantage over the pre-Christian seer, in that the Christian standard of rightness is something personal, visible, concrete, living—something to be experienced and felt in a man's own soul as he is drawn into fellowship with the Spirit of his Living Master. It is something which is not merely a cold and distant ideal, but which is an active dynamic force in our own lives urging us towards the practical fulfilment of its own standards of Christlikeness.

VI. *A just and pious and good man is the friend of the gods.*[1]

In spite of its polytheistic phrasing, this is a very noteworthy utterance, revealing Plato's new con-

[1] *Philebus*, 39.

ception of the relationship between the human and the divine.

Wherever there is genuine goodness : wherever, that is, the divine will for the self-manifestation of the Being of God through human lives has been fulfilled, there the relationship between God and man is one of friendship.

The good man knows that the Heart of the universe is friendly towards him, that he is not lonely and a stranger in a desolate wilderness, but that he is at home in the house of a Friend, and of a Friend who is Creator and Sustainer of all things, desiring only that goodness and truth should everywhere be triumphant.

It is clear that this thought of Plato constitutes an immense advance upon the conceptions of the divine current in his day. A universe governed by caprice, by divine violence or lust, gave way to a universe governed by one consistent principle, the goodness of God, forming beneficent friendship with good men.

It is true that most of us are only too fully aware that we lack the prerequisite of goodness, which Plato describes as essential to friendship between God and man : and hence we are driven to conclude that the Platonic message of the friendship of God is barren, unless we are assured, as we are in Christ, that God is our Friend, redemptively, *before* we are good. But none the less this message of the friendship of God is an immense step forward in preparation for the full truth in Christ.

VII. *Surely God must not be supposed to have a nature which He Himself hates. He who dares to say this sort of thing must not be tolerated for a moment.*[1]

This is a notable assertion of a truth which is fundamental to all theological formulation and to all expression of religious experience. It is a truth, moreover, which has to be reaffirmed in each new generation.

If we believe in and worship a God whom we hold to be good—a God, as in the case of the God of the Christians, who has been revealed, by the greatest act of love in all history, to be above all a God of Love and of self-sacrifice—then to speak of Him as having in His nature or in His activities any element (for instance) of despotism, of caprice, of the enforcing of an arbitrary will by *force majeure*, is not merely to stultify our own belief, but also rankly to blaspheme ; for it is to assert that God has a nature which He Himself hates.

We must believe that at all times and in all relationships (for example in His relationship towards those who have ' died in their sins ') God acts lovingly, that is, exactly as Christ would have acted. If Christ dealt with sinners as He did with Zacchaeus and the woman at the well and the woman taken in adultery and the woman at Simon's feast : then that is the way in which God deals with sinners. If Christ went to the Cross rather than compel men to goodness by force, then that is God's way of working for goodness.

We must continually test our ideas about God (which, as Plato tells us over and over again, are

[1] *Laws*, 901.

the most important things in our lives) by the criterion of Christlikeness ; and we must remorselessly reject any notion about God which does not show Him to be purely Christlike, or (as Plato puts it) which attributes to Him a nature which He Himself hates.

"RESIST NOT EVIL"

I. We are apt to imagine that the doctrine of non-resistance to evil, which bulks so largely in the Sermon on the Mount, and practical obedience to which led Christ to the Cross, is a distinctively and uniquely Christian thing.

But in Plato there are very plain foreshadowings even of this hard and profound truth of God :

When injured, we must not injure in return, as the many imagine ; for we must injure no one at all.[1]

Socrates declares that the man who is truly good will practise what is called in India *Ahimsa*—harmlessness. He will injure no one, not even when he is himself a victim of wanton injury. He will turn the other cheek. He will never imagine that violence—above all the taking of life—can establish truth and vindicate righteousness. He will never exact a certain amount of penalty, by violence, for a certain amount of wrong-doing ; and by inference he will never imagine that God will or can do this.

Plato shows us his master, in this respect as in so many others, to have been a strikingly Christlike man. In the supreme moment of his life we

[1] *Crito*, 49.

see Socrates enunciating this supremely Christ-like truth ; and as we watch him sitting in the jail, and listen to these words, we rejoice because the Spirit of the Eternal Christ is speaking through him, and showing us beforehand so clear a manifestation of the goodness and beauty of the Christ who is like God and the God who is like Christ.

II. In a number of passages Plato comes very near to a forecasting of Christ's principle of unresisting goodness and love, which conquers evil by bearing it redemptively :

To be boxed on the ears wrongfully is not the worst evil that can befall a man, nor to have his purse or his body cut open, but to smite and slay wrongfully is far more disgraceful and more evil.[1]

Here it is plain that we are very close to Christ's rule, " I say unto you that ye resist not evil : but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also ; and if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also ; and whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain." Plato has clearly perceived one at least of the great premises on which this rule of non-resistance is built up. He knows that it is better to suffer evil than to do it. He has not as yet reached a vision of the redemptive power of suffering love, but he is already far towards that vision. His thought in this regard is at the basis of the highest subsequent teaching of Stoicism ; for he thus launches the idea that wrong must be patiently borne because to take vengeance is to sully the soul with violence and evil passion.

[1] *Gorgias*, 508.

If we can learn this much thoroughly, and practise it, we are far on the way towards a comprehension of the further truth, which we owe to Christ, that wrong is to be suffered patiently, not merely because to take vengeance is to stain our own souls, but because there burns in us the active principle of the divine Love—the love which knows, and acts on the knowledge, that evil can only be conquered by love, that the hating and selfish will must be replaced by the good will, and that this can only be done in the manner followed by Christ when he bore unresistingly the shame and agony of the Cross.

WORSHIP

The prophet made no direct answer . . . but he summoned the Athenian envoys to him, and said: "Thus saith Ammon to the Athenians: The silent worship of the Spartans pleaseth me better than all the offerings of the other Greeks. . . ." It is foolish for us to boast that we are superior to the Spartans by reason of our much worship. The idea is unthinkable that the gods have regard, not to the justice and purity of our souls, but to costly processions and sacrifices, which men may celebrate year after year, although they have committed innumerable crimes against the gods or against their fellow-men or the State. For the gods, as Ammon and his prophet declare, are no receivers of gifts, and they scorn such unworthy service. Wherefore . . . wisdom and justice are especially honoured both by the gods and by men of sense.[1]

[1] Aristeides, *II*, 150.

Plato is here dealing manful strokes against the low ideas which were current in his day regarding worship and the divine. He is maintaining, in a mood of inspired insight, that God cannot be bribed, cannot be hoodwinked. Silent worship, coupled with true integrity of heart, is what pleases Him best.

The phraseology of the passage is still polytheistic; but the great teacher is like a Hebrew prophet in his stalwart assertion that nothing but genuine goodness can ever genuinely please God.

SIN

I. The Platonic teaching about sin, as it is contained in the *Republic*, is of great interest both from the point of view of the accurate psychological insight which it shows, and also in relation not only to Christian conceptions (ancient and modern) but also to Indian thought.

The Hindu thinks of sin as desire. The Apostle Paul spoke of the fierce conflict in a man's soul between the evil which he would not do, yet does, and the good which he would do, yet does not. To-day we think of sin as a reversion in the evolutionary process, as a survival of lower beast nature: and therefore as of necessity creating conflict in the soul. It is a gratification of bestial impulse, however cunningly gilded, however elegant and sophisticated, however secretly hidden within the recesses of a man's own soul. It is the beast within us, striving, in the up-rush of selfish desire, to regain control over our whole nature.

Plato spoke thus of sin : *In all of us, even in good men, there is a lawless wild-beast nature* ; [1] and again : *The desires, crowding in the nest like young ravens, cry aloud for food.*[2]

It would be hard to find better instances than these of the extraordinary manner in which Plato sums up in a few brief and picturesque words the experience of humanity, giving us an interpretation of truth which may be built upon by thinkers and teachers of every age and race.

The beast within us may make his attacks upon the citadel of our soul either through the breaking loose of frankly bestial passions, or through the gratification of colder and more sublimated instincts, as in the subtler forms of selfishness and jealousy. But in whatever way the outbreak occurs, and whatever may be the teaching of religion or of science, East or West, regarding the origin of the phenomenon in question, the phenomenon itself is fundamentally the same. When we sin, we are *denying progress*. We are turning our faces deliberately backward towards the bad and brutal past, from which God's creative purpose has succeeded in raising our race so far. We are becoming traitors not only to God but to our race as a whole. We are using our individual existence to slow down the advance of our brethren. We are ' passengers,' who not only refuse to pull our weight in the boat, but throw our weight against the swing of the rest, in order that the success of the whole may be jeopardized.

Plato's realization of the fact that sin is essen-

[1] *Republic*, 571. [2] *Republic*, 573.

tially atavism, a return to the beast, and that it has expression in the clamouring of bestial desire within our souls, marks him out as an essentially modern thinker, and as one to whom the whole world should still listen.

To the mind of Christ the conquest of sin came through the spontaneous allegiance of the soul to a higher loyalty. Again and again in His life upon earth our Lord cast out sin from men's hearts by bidding them follow Himself. Again and again in His teaching He emphasized the fact that it is personal loyalty—to a loving father, to an absent master, to the king of a great kingdom, to God Himself—which alone can make human hearts pure, and keep them pure. He insists in word and action upon 'the expulsive power of a new affection,' and an affection which is personal allegiance to a personal Master.

Plato also had recognized that the wild beasts of desire are best cast out of a man's heart by a new loyalty. The loyalty of whose expulsive power he speaks is the loyalty of the enlightened soul to the divine Ideas which it has beheld in the Beatific Vision, and whose impress it for ever retains. Such a loyalty to perfect goodness, beauty and truth renders the soul scatheless in the midst of corrupting evil.

Once more we see Platonic thought as the foundation for the full message of Christianity: and once more we see that message to consist in the Personality of the Christ-God.

II. Plato's teaching about sin, as the gratification of brutal desire, is of the highest significance

for the idea of progress, not merely because it insists upon the reality of progress from lower to higher nature, and from a beast-like character to a God-like character, but also because it affirms that the Divine, the dynamic Ideas, God Himself, fight for ever in us for the realization of the higher nature, against the beast which is always dragging us back towards the brutal past.

In other words, Plato's conception of sin carries with it the assertion of the fact and necessity of progress on the one side, and on the other side the assertion that progress is only to be attained through conflict, and through conflict in which the individual soul may gain supernatural strength from Him whose will it is that His likeness should be manifested in human lives.

The significance of these affirmations as a *preparatio evangelica* is sufficiently obvious. As we think them over, and strive to interpret them for ourselves in the terms of modern thought, we see the whole of history as an immense process, in which a God who is more definitely and powerfully Will than Plato ever conceived, and whose Will is love and the creation of love, is eternally working to make love sovereignly operative under the conditions of materiality. We see ourselves to be set in the world in order that we may become centres of this divine love, in order, that is, that we may step clear from the world of sense into Reality, which is God's love-process as a whole : and in order that we may help to make love rule in other men's lives. We still see progress as an unwearying advance of the whole race towards Godlikeness, but we see it as an advance which is

bought through constant conflict with the beast; and the beast-nature we recognize as lying behind all selfishness, since selfishness is the denial of the love-process, the surviving into fresh and higher stages in that process of factors conquered and subdued by love in the past.

Therefore we can echo with full approval the words of Plato when he says: *The noble is that which subjects the beast to the man, or rather to the God in man: and the ignoble is that which subjects the man to the beast. . . . He is a miserable caitiff who remorselessly sells his divine being to that which is most godless and detestable.*[1]

Sin is a deliberate turning of one's back on progress, a deliberate siding with reaction, obscurantism, atavism, against the forces of freedom, co-operation and enlightenment. It is a facing round towards the dark past, a choosing of slavery instead of liberty, of the beast instead of God. Therefore it is a fearful tragedy. It is something to provide a way of escape from which was worth the giving of God's own very life; for it both stultifies God's whole purpose in creation, and torments and ruins the creatures whom God perfectly loves.

III. *What else is it to be thoroughly unhappy, than to desire things that are evil, and to have them our own.*[2]

Plato has perceived clearly what many of us still do not perceive at all—that evil is not an affair of transgressing transcendental taboos, nor of breaking divine orders, nor of ceremonial and ritual

[1] *Republic*, 589. [2] *Meno*, 78.

impurity, nor of defying social institutions and conventions, but that it is simply and solely an affair of the man's inner heart. We frequently call pain evil, bereavement evil, failure evil. But such things are not in reality evil at all. They may on the contrary be in the highest sense good. Evil, as Christ taught, comes from the man's inner self, and defiles him because it is the fruit of a corrupted heart within him. It is the result of beast-like desire, above all the result of a selfish will which is out of accord with the divine reality of goodness, purity and truth.

Evil being in this sense psychological, and being a denial of the man's true nature, and a defiance of the divine plan in creating him, the state of such a man is profoundly unhappy. He may have all the wealth, fame and power that earth can give, and yet he is a poor deluded wretch, unhappier than other men in so far as he is more evil than they.

Happiness, on the other hand, is identification with the will of God, in complete self-committal to the Divine purposes. It is the vision of God, communion with God, love for God ; and since these things by their very nature cannot end, such happiness is undying and eternal.

The service of the momentary infinitesimal self, instead of the world-purpose of love and goodness, results in the ruining, the effacement, of the harmony which should exist between the individual and the whole in the carrying forward of the process of creation. It means therefore that the evil man puts himself ' out of the running,' commits spiritual suicide, defies eternity, blas-

phemes the divine Ideas, and in so doing destroys himself. Hence sin is the condemning of the man by himself to destruction.

Such fixing of the individual's impulses and aspirations upon what is contrary to God, and upon what defies His Will, is a black and ghastly tragedy. It is misfortune and unhappiness above all else possible on earth.

And, as Plato points out, such unhappiness is most complete when its individual and anarchic ambitions are gratified—when the man attains 'successfully' all the evil which he desires.

These things sound dull platitudes to our ears. But in the ancient world they came as a message of original and revolutionary truth from Plato's lips; and they formed a magnificent preparation for Christ's teaching regarding the real nature of evil as a state of inward spiritual corruption and of estrangement from the divine Will.

IV. Plato is amazingly 'modern' in his treatment of ethical problems, and especially in his views regarding the meaning of evil to the human soul. To him, as to those who have been trained in modern methods of thought regarding psychology and evolution, evil (which Plato is wont to call injustice) is a breaking loose of the beast within man in such a fashion as to create a fundamental psychological conflict in his soul, and to produce in him a feebleness, a fickleness, a vacillation, which renders him incapable of concentrating his will upon higher things.

Injustice is a strife and a rising up of part of the soul against the whole . . . made by a rebellious subject

against a true prince, of whom he is the natural vassal.[1]

As is natural with a Greek, the thought is cast in political guise ; but this does not take away from the psychological accuracy of this doctrine of conflict, to which we have returned so plainly to-day in our thought about sin. Plato is in line with the modern analysers of the spirit of man, who hold that ' injustice ' is to be traced to a deep inner conflict, which, perhaps unconsciously, is rending the sinner's soul asunder. Plato is in line also with the great body of less specialized modern thought, which recognizes in sin the uprising of bestial lusts within the man's nature, the sudden wakening to life of atavistic impulses, the mis-expression of instincts which have been useful in the course of racial history, but which are a curse to-day unless they are rightly sublimated. He is in line also with those who hold that there is in man the Spirit of God, the true man, the Inward Christ, the divine Idea of what humanity should be, ceaselessly striving to draw each one of us away from grossness and selfishness into the realm of goodness, truth, beauty, and love.

The ' true prince ' is present in each one of us. He is our real nature ; and evil is not merely a conflict within the soul, but a foul and damnable treachery to this true prince.

There have been epochs of religious history, for instance that of the Puritans, which have been profoundly pessimistic in their view of the nature of man. It has been held in these epochs that man is naturally bestial, and that any goodness

[1] *Republic*, 444.

there may be in him comes by a divine miracle from outside.

But Plato holds no such view. He is profoundly an optimist in his outlook on human nature. To him man is naturally good ; for he is the highest handiwork of the God who is wholly good, and whose activity consists in an eternal endeavour to create the likeness of Himself. The true man to Plato, the natural man, is the man who completely manifests the divine Idea of what manhood should be. Evil is unnatural. It is a revolt. It may be universal ; but still it is a perversion, an abortion. It is a treachery against the ' true prince ' in each one of us.

There is no need to insist that Christ also was profoundly optimistic with regard to the nature of man. It is enough to remark that He bade His followers be perfect even as their Father in heaven is perfect : and that He bade men love each other as He had loved them. These two sayings prove absolutely clearly that He took the Platonic and not the Puritanic view of humanity. Especially through the teaching and interpretation of St. John this side of the Christian message speedily took root in the ground prepared by Plato.

V. The greatest and most signal and terrible punishment of evil is the desire for more evil. We are slowly coming to recognize to-day the truth of this principle. Yet it is one which was powerfully enunciated by Plato twenty-three hundred years ago.

No one, as I may say, ever considers that which is

declared to be the greatest penalty of evil-doing—namely to grow into the likeness of bad men, and growing like them to fly from the conversation of the good, and be cut off from them, and cleave to and follow the company of the bad.[1]

The recognition of this truth is urgently needed in our present-day religious thinking. We must learn to look upon evil and its punishment in this Platonic light once more—realizing that the real penalty of sin is more sin, the progressive deterioration of the soul, till its tastes are depraved, its beauty grossly tarnished, its capacities for goodness hopelessly stunted and degenerate, and all its likings and affinities those of evil.

Hell—and a Hell ten thousand times more awful than one of eternal fire—is to become steadily worse and worse, spontaneously to herd with the depraved, to become more and more like them, to ' cleave to them,' to lose all taste for and interest in goodness, to stamp out the divine Light within the soul (though indeed that Light can never wholly be extinguished), voluntarily to turn one's back upon, and separate oneself from, the God of beauty and goodness.

VI. *The true lie is hatred.*[2]

Here is one of those Platonic utterances to which reference has been made—an utterance which stands forth from a dull page with the radiance of a star. It sums up for us in five short words a truth so profound as to be for ever new.

[1] *Laws*, 728. [2] *Republic*, 382.

The intellect of man strives eternally, as Plato himself strove, to find the truth. This truth is generally conceived of as something to be grasped by intricate mental analysis, or by accurate and painstaking observation of natural phenomena. But in reality truth and falsehood do not lie for Plato, great philosopher though he is, in the intellectual sphere at all. Hatred is the only real lie, and love the only genuine truth ; for truth is an ethical reality, existing rather in the realm of conduct than in that of thought and the expression of thought ; and *Love is the desire of men that good should be for ever present with them.*[1]

He who hates his brother denies God and the reality of God ; for God is goodness and love, and to hate is to deny God far more blasphemously and insolently than by cursing and swearing, like Peter in the High Priest's courtyard, that we know Him not. To hate is to set the individual will deliberately against the will of God, which is Love, the antithesis of hatred. To hate is to assert, not merely in words but in the far more emphatic manner of practical conduct, that God's purposes can be flouted and set at naught.

To hate is to give the lie to creation, to the constructive purpose wherein the worlds have their being—the purpose of love. It is to set on foot a rebellion—and a rebellion which may spread with lightning speed—against God's sovereignty. It is to deny the supreme authority of His will. It is to assert that He has been deluded in striving to create a world in which souls may learn to love. It is to laugh God to scorn in bitter mockery.

[1] *Symposium*, 206.

It is the unforgivable sin against the Holy Ghost.

For falsehood is not merely an affair of verbal inaccuracy, or of failure to correlate statement with fact. It is in spirit and action to fight against God's purposes in creation.

Conversely, however, *Love is the desire of men that good should be for ever present with them.* It is the setting of the individual will in line with the divine creative purpose, of the kindling of God's likeness in the world, through the manifestation in human souls of His goodness and beauty. It is the affirmation of the truth of God, an affirmation made with the whole force of a man's nature choosing God's way and God's will and God's nature of goodness.

HAPPINESS

I. As we read through the record of the days and hours preceding the death of Socrates—'the second finest death-scene in all history,' as it has justly been called—what strikes us most is not forgiving and redemptive love, as in the finest death-scene of all, but the marvellous self-possession, courage and dignity of one who is conscious of being and acting in accordance with the divine will, which is goodness and therefore happiness.

Men and women who are gentle and good are also happy, and the unjust and evil are miserable.[1]

The words seem commonplace enough to us now; but they were by no means commonplace

[1] *Gorgias*, 471.

to the generation which first heard them. In that bright hard Athenian world, with its slavery, its exploitation of an empire held down by force and by the type of spasmodic frightfulness which had destroyed Melos, its nameless corruption, which makes some even of Plato hardly fit to read to-day, it was an exceedingly original thing for a teacher to propound the paradox (as Gorgias quite genuinely conceived it to be) that those who are good are also always those who are happy, and that those who are evil are unhappy.

As applied also by Socrates himself in the course of the events leading up to his death, this principle is anything but commonplace. For Socrates, as Plato shows him to us, practised what he preached with supreme faithfulness. He saw that loyalty to truth and to God, and the effort to do God's will in the world, and to lay the foundations of a better Athens which should be more like a Kingdom of God, demanded a certain course of action, which in time became more and more dangerous to his life. Finally he was faced with circumstances under which it would have been perfectly easy for him, again and again, to escape death and so to continue his good work for the world, merely by swerving a hairbreadth from his principles. He might have taken a more conciliatory line at the trial. He might have fallen in with any one of his friends' numerous schemes for his escape from prison. But instead he shows himself almost quixotic in his meticulous obedience to conscience. He is exactingly intransigent in his demands upon himself for the most complete and precise obedience to what he conceives to be

right. And this is exactly why it comes about that we have ever heard of Socrates, and why Plato was inspired to write his Dialogues and to give to the world all the marvellous gifts which he did give through those Dialogues.

If Socrates had been a little more reasonable with himself and his friends in regard to the application of his principles : if he had consented with a little more ' common sense ' to a convenient compromise with truth, the world would never have had the supremely important *preparatio evangelica* which came through the inspiration given by this man's life and death to his great disciple.

Socrates refused to swerve by one hairbreadth from his loyalty to conscience—or rather, let us say, to God, whose Spirit had set in his heart the conviction that the only thing which really mattered for him personally and for the race as a whole was that right should be done and the Divine will followed at all costs.

This persistence in following truth led directly to Socrates' death, which may thus be regarded as in a real sense a redemptive death (though perhaps not consciously so)—a death died for truth, for goodness, for the Kingdom of God : a death died that men might know the way of salvation, and that God's will might be done.

II. In the life of the soul which truly desires to reach a knowledge of the reality behind the world of appearance ' all things work together for good ' —or, as Plato puts it in the *Phaedrus*,[1] *If the ends be*

[1] 274.

glorious, all that befalls us in seeking them is glorious also. In this thought there is the secret of happiness in the world, a happiness which cannot be shaken by external calamity, and which goes on beyond this life, because it is founded in the deathless life of the spirit, and in converse with eternal reality.

Here also the conceptions of Plato and of Christianity coalesce, and lead the soul of man forward on a constantly ascending road towards a state which is ever better and fairer in the future.

In the life of the soul which truly seeks God, and truly desires to do His will, if it bows itself humbly before Him and confesses its weakness and failure, seeking day by day more whole-heartedly to forget all that holds it back from the knowledge of God and from converse with eternal reality, which is God, there may come disaster and suffering ; but whatever happens, if only the will is honestly striving to subordinate everything to His service, life will be glorious and triumphant. Defeat and failure will not matter to him who is seeking this end. Pain and bereavement, poverty, persecution, unmerited shame—these things will beat upon him, but only to make his soul stronger, and to implant more firmly in his will the knowledge that come what may God is still holding him and caring for him, and that in His care no evil can befall him. He will perceive that suffering is a school wherein he may know more about God. And so long as he is learning that lesson, life is infinitely glorious and infinitely worth while, because (however sore the suffering may be for a time) there is always a day ahead in which he may

learn more about God. Battered and torn, he will still greet the unseen future with a cheer, because he knows that God is with him, teaching him more of His love.

THE VALUE OF THE AVERAGE MAN

Plato possesses in a very remarkable degree the immensely significant capacity of seeing the truth, the beauty and the goodness of ordinary plain people. He can perceive in the most unlikely of mankind some reflection of the divine Ideas which he has beheld in Beatific Vision, and whose manifestation in the world around him he is always eager both to recognize and to encourage.

In the *Gorgias* he puts into the mouth of the self-opinionated Callicles this taunt against Socrates : "*Socrates, you are literally always talking of cobblers and fullers and cooks . . . as if this had to do with our argument.*" [1] The words serve to illustrate a characteristic in Socrates which was frequently noticed both by his disciples and by his enemies, and which made an indelible impression on the mind of this greatest of his disciples—he deals with simple things and simple people in what seems a naïve and sometimes even a childish manner, but he deals with them in such a way as to bring out unanswerably some deep truth about the world and man's life in the world. Socrates and Plato know the importance of the average man not only from the point of view of effecting any radical change in the thought and practice of mankind,

[1] 491.

and in the organization of human society, but also from the point of view of eternal things. Master and pupil are aware that it frequently happens that the average man is nearer to the truth, and more faithful in following the divine will of Godlikeness, than many who profess great things and have a great reputation for wisdom and sanctity. Hence the Platonic Dialogues stand for an assertion of that profoundly Christian fact that in simple things, in ordinary human nature, in plain straightforward thinking, in commonplace relationships, there are to be discerned by the truly seeing eye divine and eternal realities.

It is a trend of thought which received the highest of all corroboration and fulfilment when Christ took the ordinary facts and relationships of that commonest of human associations and most primitive of institutions, the home, in order to illustrate the nature and activities of the Most High God, who cares for us His children with a love infinitely exceeding that of the most perfect earthly parent.

Socrates could see eternal truth in cobblers and cooks. Christ used human parenthood to demonstrate God's inmost reality : " If ye then being evil know how to give good things to your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven . . ."

HUMILITY

The most famous single expression of the Socratic doctrine of humility is the following :

I am better off than he is ; for he knows nothing, and

thinks that he knows; I neither know nor think that I know.[1]

This great master of truth is not merely content, as we have already noticed, to learn from cobblers and cooks, and all manner of ordinary folk whom those supposing themselves wise usually despise and laugh at, but the more he learns the more he is impressed by his own vast ignorance in face of the depth and height of the divine beauty and goodness—for it is the search for this ultimate truth, the only real wisdom, about which Socrates is speaking when he utters the words quoted above from the *Apology*.

Thus he is not merely unafraid of the derision which might be—and was—aroused against himself by his eagerness to find out more about truth and right from types of people who were regarded as ridiculously ignorant of such things, but he is deeply conscious that the highest human wisdom, even in the case of a man who had spent the whole of a long life in the earnest pursuit of truth, is but the sighting of the coastline of an immense continent, and the confession that nothing at all is known of the real continent itself.

Socrates is thus a forerunner of all those whose search for God has brought them, the nearer they come to Him who is their Goal, into a more and more definite realization of their own nothingness, of their own complete unworthiness and inability to comprehend the divine mysteries of goodness, beauty and love, of their own grossness and sinfulness in face of God's holiness. Such

[1] *Apology*, 21.

humility is the truest and deepest of all humility. It is a genuinely Christian thing; for it is an essential element in that childlike attitude towards God which Christ inculcated.

TRUTHFULNESS

Truthfulness is more than a strict adherence to verbal accuracy in describing what has taken place in the past. It is more than strict adherence to fact—though indeed this is a part, and an important part, of truth.

Truth is the bending of a man's whole heart and will into line with the divine purpose. It is the setting of the individual life into alignment with the eternal process of God's creative action in this world and outside it.

Yet this wider conception of truth includes the lesser and narrower. Deception, falsehood, treachery, are utterly impossible to him in whom there burns the desire—and it is a desire which has the incomparable quality of for ever satisfying itself—that his individual life may be in touch with divine reality and may serve as a channel for the carrying forward of the divine purpose and will.

Will not the philosopher utterly hate a lie? [1] The state of soul of him who has seen the Beatific Vision, however briefly and brokenly, must be complete and whole. He can have no division in his will and personality, such as is inevitably caused by deception, falsehood, or treachery. His whole being moves forward as one compact unit

[1] *Republic*, 490.

of will, along one straight path, the path of God's purpose. Deception of necessity means the serving of two masters, a scattering of aim, a diversion of will.

Not only so, but the man who has seen the Vision, Plato's 'Philosopher' and 'Guardian,' will hate from the bottom of his heart all sleek and specious hypocrisies, all lying conventions. Christ, who was generally so meek and gentle, hurled fierce and scathing condemnation at the pious and respectable hypocrisy of the Pharisees, because it was false, because it hid hatred, avarice and injustice; and the follower of Christ will perceive that both in the thought of his Master and in that of Plato there is this fundamental demand for truthfulness of motive and action against the hollow falsity of self-righteous hypocrisy.

IMMORTALITY

I. The Idea of Goodness, in Plato's highest thought, is personified and realized to be God. The training of the Guardians of the State that they may behold the Beatific Vision becomes a fundamentally religious enterprise—it is the effort to bring them into personal contact, through deep inward experience, with the God who is perfect goodness and beauty, and (as we know) perfect love. The Beatific Vision is the Vision of the Father.

Plato taught that this Beatific Vision is in itself the very stuff of immortality. To enjoy it is to be lifted into the immortal realm, here and now.

The souls of those who attain this Beatific Vision are ever hastening into the upper world, where they desire to live.[1] It is the lesson which Christ taught when He insisted that God is not a God of the dead but of the living—in other words that the friendship of God once enjoyed goes on for ever, for nothing can rob God of His friends ; but the thought of Christ, as always, is filled with a deep personal enthusiasm for the Father which in Plato has only just begun to dawn : 'This is life eternal, that they may know *Thee*. . . .'

Those who have seen the Beatific Vision are for ever straining, as Plato teaches, to be away inward into contact with heavenly reality, with that world which lies so close to us in our souls, yet is so infinitely different from the world of time and sense around us.

This is not the teaching of unpractical mysticism ; for an essential element in the thought of Plato, as in that of Christ, is the conception that the Beatific Vision must axiomatically result in the endeavour to be like that which has been Seen. The soul which has enjoyed that Vision at once and spontaneously sets itself in strenuous effort to become like the Idea of the Good, to allow God's will to work through it unimpeded for the creation within it of likeness to Himself. Hence the Vision, if it has been experienced at all, bears fruit in practical character.

Souls that have seen the Vision thus become centres of the life of God, visibly and concretely embodying the manifestation of the Idea of Goodness. Thereby they are here and now lifted, in

[1] *Republic*, 517.

their real being, into the eternal realm, where they desire to live, and do live, a life which is undying, because it is linked with the life of God.

II. The Beatific Vision of truth makes a man utterly indifferent to death. He knows that death is but the gateway of life—the portal through which he goes to the full and unclouded knowledge of that Reality which here on earth he has only been able to glimpse occasionally and in tantalizingly brief and incomplete fashion. For years his real life has been lived in contact with the great Facts of the other world ; and he is eager to lay aside the encumbrances and blindnesses of the body, in order that at last he may see clearly what he has believed in and held communion with for so long.

As Plato says, *How can he who is the spectator of all time and all existence account death fearful ?* [1]

The man who has seen and dwelt with this vision of reality must of necessity greet death as a friend, as a great revealer. He knows the extreme littleness of things which most men account valuable—money, power, success, fame, popularity. His whole sense of values has been transformed and ennobled, and made eternal and Godlike, by his converse with eternal reality, with God. He knows that the only permanently and unshakably valuable thing in the world is character—character built up by the creative power of the divine Idea manifesting itself in goodness, beauty and love, within human souls. He judges of life, as it affects both himself and others, simply and solely

[1] *Republic*, 486.

by the manner in which these fair eternal things are developed through human personality. And he judges of death by the fact that death will introduce us to a realm in which, if we have honestly striven after God's ideal for our lives in this world, we shall be brought into contact with eternal goodness, beauty and love, so that we may have perfect communion with them.

A man who looks on life and death in this fashion is obviously not one who will fear death. He will welcome it as Revealer and Fulfiller.

All such teaching is marvellously close to that of Jesus Christ. It served as a preparation in the ancient world for the teachings of Christ : and in our own day also it may still lead our spirits boldly forward into deeper and fuller apprehension of what Christ's teaching signifies concerning both life and death. That teaching casts over the whole problem of immortality the rich glow of personal devotion, devotion to the Christlike God, to the Father who loves us infinitely more than even our own mothers loved us ; and who will welcome us home to Himself, as Christ welcomed the children to His knee.

For us death is not merely not terrible. It is not merely to be welcomed with sober joy as Revealer and Fulfiller. Death is the Father's arms. It is the looking up, with clear sight at last, into the Father's face.

III. In the *Phaedrus* of Plato [1] occurs the following dazzlingly beautiful description of the origin of the soul :

[1] 250.

In the heavenly choir . . . we were perfect and untainted by the evil which awaited us in time to come ; and perfect too and simple, and calm and blissful were the visions which we were solemnly admitted to gaze upon in the purest light, ourselves being no less pure.

This is one of those passages which bring home to the reader's mind the fact that Plato was far more than a philosopher dealing with metaphysical abstractions : far more also than a poet (though he was a supremely great poet). He was a man of religion, whose whole outlook upon the world was conditioned by the inner vision which he enjoyed of eternal reality, a vision which formed the reality behind all his life and work.

He bases his great argument for the immortality of the soul upon the fact that there exists in the mind of man the capacity for recognizing intuitively what is beautiful and good. This capacity can, he believes, only be accounted for by the fact that we come ' from God, who is our Home.' Our souls, before they came to this world, must have dwelt at peace in the heavenly sphere, where they had direct experience of Ideal goodness, beauty and truth. Nothing else can, to the mind of Plato, explain those moments of sudden insight, which come to all of us, when we seem suddenly to break through the veil of sense into another realm, so that we are filled with the joyful conviction that we have known this or that aspect of beauty and truth from all eternity, and are now recognizing it as an old friend.

These moments of illumination may be explained differently in accordance with currently popular psychology. But he who has experienced

them—and we have all experienced them in some degree or other—will instinctively distrust any proliferator of scientific jargon who claims more for his theories than merely that they represent a possible explanation of the 'how' of such phenomena, and who does not recognize that the 'what' and the 'why' lie beyond his province.

We have heard, or read, with listless attention multitudes of poems. Suddenly we read a certain line ; and something awakes with a shout within us, 'That is beautiful, and beautiful with a beauty beyond anything I have ever read : and it is true also ; for I knew it ages ago, in another realm, a realm where only the true and the beautiful existed.' We have all of us been through some such experience as this.

Or perhaps we have been walking through a picture gallery, our eyes confused and dazzled, and our taste distressed, by what seem meaningless daubs all around us. Suddenly, perhaps from a long distance away, we see something which stands out like a star from its surroundings. As we go up to it, we know that we are on holy ground ; for there Beauty and Truth have broken through into our sordid world.

Or again, we have listened, perhaps for years, to all manner of music, and none of it has seemed more to us than foolish incomprehensible clanging. Suddenly we hear a totally new kind of music—a few bars only, it may be, that achieve with effortless perfection the expression of another order of existence, in which Beauty and Truth are the only reality.

But most common of all is the experience of

this ' break through,' as it has been called, in connection with the beauty of nature, especially amongst the mountains, and in the silence of dawn. Under such circumstances the phenomenal world around us seems frequently to be stripped clean away, to be rolled up and to disappear like the curtain at a theatre, leaving Beauty and Truth patent before our eyes.

There are men to whom these experiences are not merely evanescent and occasional, as they are to most of us, but constantly recurring, so that they live the major part of their lives in converse with Beauty and Truth. We may laugh at such men as unpractical visionaries ; but it is possible that such mirth may be misplaced.

In any case those who have enjoyed these experiences (and they come to all of us in some measure) cannot read the *Phaedrus* of Plato without feeling that there is something fundamentally and eternally true about Plato's explanation. He may have written it twenty-three hundred years ago, in a world totally different from our own, a world as yet lacking the practical dynamic of Christian idealism, but yet he wrote the truth ; and Wordsworth also wrote the truth when he reproduced the thought of Plato on these things in his great ' Ode on the Intimations of Immortality in Early Childhood.' Plato is *right* when he says, as he does in the *Phaedrus*, *Every man's soul has by the law of his birth been a spectator of eternal truth.* We know, by our own inner experience, and by our converse with men perhaps of various types and classes and races, that there is this faculty in the

human soul, and in every human soul, of recognizing by a flash of divine intuition the manifestation of eternal reality in the phenomenal world —of perceiving and valuing aright Goodness, Beauty and Truth (and, being Christians, we add, as the most important of all, Love).

We know also that Plato is *right* when he says, *Whenever they see here any resemblance of what they witnessed there, they are struck with wonder, and can no longer contain themselves, though what it is that thus affects them they know not.*

Our souls come from God. Their home is in God ; and whenever we see the eternal Beauty, whether in poem or music or mountain or in any other way, we are amazingly filled with joy. It is the same whenever we perceive, perhaps in the realization of the meaning behind some abstruse scientific law, the eternal Truth of God. It is the same whenever we discern, in the character, for instance, of some quite simple person, perhaps of a child, the manifestation of the Goodness of God. But we are above all joyful when, perhaps through the simplest forms of human loving-kindness, we perceive the eternal Love of God.

For the Christian all these forms of eternal reality are perfectly summed up in Christ.

IV. *The soul goes to another place . . . excellent, pure and invisible, to the presence of a good and wise God . . . and on its arrival there, it is its lot to be happy, free from error, ignorance, fears, wild passions, and all the other evils to which human nature is subject.*[1]

[1] *Phaedo* 81.

Here is the eternal hope of Immortality, expressed in words of flashing and dazzling beauty, and in a manner as appealing and convincing as the spirit of man can imagine.

The soul which has used aright the opportunities given to it in this world for loving God and Godlike things, beauty, goodness and truth, goes straight to God after physical death, and there dwells happily in His presence, rejoicing in the direct and immediate vision of Reality—of the Person who is perfectly pure, good, true, loving and beautiful. That vision—the turning from shadows to behold the Sun in his glory, as it is pictured in the great passage about the Prisoners in the Den at the beginning of the seventh book of the *Republic*—is the fulfilment of every aspiration after reality, every impulse to seek out and to value aright beauty, goodness and truth. It is the realization of the man's true nature, the achieving of God's ideal for him.

Even in this world the Beatific Vision may be gained, as is taught in the *Republic*. The soul may rise above suffering and evil by partaking in God's nature and doing His will and beholding Him steadfastly through devotion and faith. So, and so only, may the Vision be seen, in so far as it may be seen by those who dwell still upon earth.

But beyond death the soul which has come to know God dimly in this world, will see Him fully and perfectly, and will dwell in Him, as Plato has pictured it, free from all evil, ineffably blessed.

All this realm of thought is an obvious preparation for Christ's teaching regarding immortality as being the knowledge of God.

V. *The soul, since it is immortal, can have no other refuge from evils, nor safety, except by becoming as good and wise as possible.*[1]

In spite of the praise which all subsequent generations have been in the habit of giving, often extravagantly, to Athens in the heyday of her prosperity and beauty, she was in various ways what we should now call a sink of moral corruption. To comprehend the significance and horror of this corruption we have only (for instance) to read the *Phaedrus*. Much of Plato arises out of and reflects his own age. He is never consciously and deliberately impure, but in picturing his age and speaking to it, he could not but show the unspeakable filth which defiled it. He was a seer of all time, but he was also (and therefore) a man of his own age. He was bound to show things as they were. In consequence a good deal of what he wrote is in a very real sense not fit to be read in our day.

These things must be recognized in order not only that we may not be repelled by Plato's realism in this respect, but that we may discern the more clearly the amazing genius which made it possible for him, by the sudden flash of an inspired intuition, to give utterance to such truths as that quoted above. The grossly filthy setting of much of his great teaching serves to show up the transcendent beauty of the teaching itself. It concentrates our attention the more effectively upon the miracle of his insight into beauty and truth.

The only safety for a soul which is immortal—

[1] *Phaedo*, 107.

whose existence must go on for weal or woe in the world which lies beyond death—is in genuine goodness. For a soul which cannot die to give itself up to evil, to set itself deliberately counter to the divine will, to indulge its beast nature in hatred and selfishness, is obviously for it to thrust itself into the most deadly peril. It can only be safe and happy in the universe as it comes into line with the eternal purpose of truth and purity, goodness and love.

THE BEATIFIC VISION

I. Plato is constantly recurring to the thought of the Beatific Vision. He has seen that Vision himself; and he cannot, through many of his great Dialogues, keep his attention far distant from it. Again and again his mind turns back to it, perhaps in quite unlikely contexts.

Those who see the absolute and eternal and immutable may be said to know.[1]

Those who really live in the world, who live not a brief 'red-blooded' existence of self-assertion, soon to be bounded by weakness, old age, extinction, but a life which is in contact with eternal reality, attuned to the purpose of the Whole, and which shall therefore never die—these are men who have seen, at any rate in some degree, the Beatific Vision. They are men also who, having seen, hunger and thirst night and day for more of that Vision, and for a steady clearing away of all

[1] *Republic*, 479.

that hinders them from beholding it fully. They are men who hold everything else in life cheap and worthless that they may gain this fulfilment of their being in the deathless knowledge of the Truth, and in the supreme joy of that knowledge.

Men of every race have striven after this Vision of God, calling it by many different names. Augustine said, " The object of life is the Vision of God " : and he said this although under one aspect of his many-sided personality he was a stern dogmatist, and under another he was a great constructive statesman. The Hindu will travel thousands of miles, and face willingly every kind of hardship and even death itself, that he may obtain the coveted *darshana*, the face-to-face vision of some image which he believes to be the vehicle of an especially plain representation of the divine. And as for ourselves, we must realize that we are worse men than our forefathers in the Church, worse men even than the Hindus, with their inexhaustible stores of simple-hearted devotion, if we also do not strive all our lives through, as the one worthy object of those lives, to behold the Vision of God—the Vision which makes us long above all else to show forth in ourselves something of the likeness of God.

II. *You are beautiful, Theaetetus, and not ugly, as Theodorus was saying ; for he who utters the beautiful is himself beautiful and good.*[1]

[1] *Theaetetus*, 185.

Socrates, who was notoriously ugly himself, breaks out into this queer exclamation at a point when Theaetetus has shown that he has grasped aright the main argument of the Socratic idealism—'the mind, by a power of her own (he has said), contemplates the universals in all things.'

As he perceives that at last his pupil has assimilated his teaching, and in such a way as to be able to stand for the truth himself, Socrates rejoices greatly in spirit; for he feels that here the divine Idea of Beauty has broken through into the world, manifesting itself in the mind which he has been training; and this is the highest and purest joy that can ever come to any teacher.

The capacity for seeing truth, for piercing the veil of ignorance and illusion which hides eternal reality from us, the power of beholding the Beatific Vision, in itself makes a man beautiful and good; for he cannot see the divine beauty and truth without at once himself longing and striving to partake of them. He who hungers and thirsts after righteousness shall be filled—this is Plato's most stalwart conviction. The teacher rejoices greatly when he has succeeded in stirring the power of vision into activity in any soul; for to do so is to reap success in his task in life—the task of bringing into creative operation in the minds of his pupils this passion for the Vision of Truth and Beauty, which will make them, above all else, desire and strive after likeness to God.

III. Plato's whole scheme of thought, and all his outlook upon the world, are incurably theo-

centric. The Vision of God which he has seen brings his soul back again and again to the Truth as it is in God ; and therefore his keen artistic mind, wherever it may stray, is continually returning to the expression, from this angle and from that, of the one central conviction of his life—the conviction that nothing else really matters one whit in the whole world, except God.

The whole of the corporate life of man, the whole of his social and political existence, is seen by Plato as God-centred.

God is the natural and worthy object of our most serious and blessed endeavours.[1]

All ethical, all metaphysical truth is God-centred also. We exist, the worlds exist, that we and the worlds may aid in the eternal process of the self-manifestation of Him who is perfect goodness and beauty.

There are few Christians to-day whose outlook, either in thought or in practice, is one-tenth as Christocentric as Plato's outlook is theocentric. We must return to his thought in shame at our neglect of so great a lesson, and seek to re-think our world and our attitude to it in the terms of a faith in God at least as solid and comprehensive as that of this great forerunner of the Truth.

Above all, we must strive after the Beatific Vision of God, on which the mind of Plato is so ardently set, and which has the power of kindling the likeness of God in men's lives.

[1] *Laws*, 803.

EDUCATION

I. *God is always to be represented as He truly is . . . He is truly good, and must be represented as such.*[1]

This assertion of the perfect goodness of God, made in such a time and environment as that of fourth-century Athens, is the most plain and dazzling of all possible proofs that Plato was not merely philosopher and poet, not only the greatest of all instructors of mankind in the art of thought, but also a supreme religious prophet, to be set beside the greatest of the Jewish prophets.

If we consider the character of Greek mythology, and the nature of the popular religion current in Plato's day, we shall perceive how revolutionary was this utterance. Indeed, as Plato himself recognized, the principle thus enunciated meant that the great mass of what was then held to be religious literature, including Homer, who was to the Greeks as sacred as the Bible is to us (and perhaps more so), must be pronounced to be demoralizing, and must be barred out of any adequate and rightly-devised scheme of education.

Plato was absolutely uncompromising in his insistence that it is a crime and a blasphemy of the blackest kind to allow the youthful mind to be brought into contact with false and debased views about God. Holding as he did that by far the most important thing both for man and com-

[1] *Republic*, 379.

munity is that they should think rightly about God, and recognize His nature as what it really is, he declared unending warfare upon everything which helped to implant in the minds of the young thoughts about God which were not true to reality.

It would be well for us in our time if we were possessed by the same fearless zeal for the truth about God, and if we felt with a tenth part of Plato's intensity of conviction that what men think about God matters enormously both for them individually and for the State. But at least we can see to it that no children over whom we have any control are taught to think of God as anything but perfect goodness and love.

II. If a man is to realize the true manhood in his life, the purpose for which he has been created by God, there comes a stage in his development when he must stand still, and soon begin to go backward, or else he must go forward to the deepest of all experiences in human life, the Vision of eternal reality.

Plato phrases it thus: *The time has now arrived in their training at which the Guardians must raise the eye of the soul to the universal light which lightens all things, and behold the absolute good.*[1] No man can be fitted to influence and direct the lives of others: no man can be said for one moment to have received an adequate training for a life of responsibility and public service—and in our modern democracies it cannot be too strenuously asserted

[1] *Republic*, 549.

that *every man and every woman* should receive this training—who has not been taught to behold the vision of eternal truth. In seeing that vision he is brought to a knowledge of his own life, and of the purpose for which it has been given to him. He is taught whence he came and whither he goes. He perceives the function for the performance of which God has given him being—the high and noble function of the creation of God's own likeness in beauty and truth amongst men. He is gripped by the undying aspiration to become in deed and in truth like God, to live His likeness out visibly and concretely in the world, and to make the community in which he is set Godlike also.

No training, no education, is satisfactory which does not bring the pupil to the point at which he may see this vision, and which does not teach him to expect and to aspire after the vision, breeding in him an inappeasable longing for it, and a hungry craving for the goodness and beauty of which he knows that vision to be the perfect revelation. In all our thought about education we must flee back to this ancient ideal, which is still and for ever supreme, remembering that the only end of true education is the beholding by the new generation of the Vision of God.

III. Plato teaches that the truest and deepest learning is the learning about those things which alone truly exist. Education is the consistent and prolonged effort to bring the soul into contact with eternal reality. And it is his belief that this type of education will prove fruitful and per-

manent beyond all others, because it is facilitated and rendered efficient by an innate bias of the soul towards the apprehension of such truth. There is in every man the power and capacity for God, and for learning about Him. To whatever race or nation human beings may belong, however low may be their cultural level, however bigoted their minds, there is still this inalienable capacity within them for beholding and appreciating the truth of God, and (what is practically of far more importance, since it is the only proof that the education has been successful) of showing forth the likeness of God.

About this type of education—the education in the knowledge of eternal reality, which bears fruit in Godlike lives, and is the only type of education worth calling education at all—Plato says, *The power and capacity of learning exist in the soul already.*[1] The phrase occurs at the end of the great parable about the Prisoners in the Den, and education is being spoken of as the effort to enable such prisoners to turn their eyes from shadows to truth, and from the dim spectral gloom of their underground dungeon to the light of the Sun. *Last of all he* (the man so educated) *will be able to see the Sun, and he will contemplate him as he is.*[2]

In this Platonic conception of the true function of education, and of the faculty within the soul of recollecting truth which has been apprehended directly, before birth into this world, there is something marvellously noble, and at the same time marvellously encouraging. It is in direct relation also with the Christian belief in the Light

[1] *Republic*, 518. [2] 516.

which lighteth every man, and with the immense optimism which inspired Jesus Christ when He bade His followers be perfect with the divine perfection. Christ did not utter that command as a bitter taunt, knowing our utter incapacity ever to obey it. He knew that within the soul of every man there is the faculty for God, and the faculty for Godlikeness. He knew that in actual practice there is in every soul some small likeness of God, some trace of love and generous feeling, however far the man may have sunk towards the beast. He called in no uncertain tones for a fulfilment of the inherent capacities of man's soul, and for a fulfilment that would show itself not merely in rapturous mystical experience, but in solid change of life.

As Plato put it, in every man there is some faint reflection of the divine Idea of Goodness, and the most fundamental enterprise upon which human beings may engage is the enterprise of helping, by the right kind of education, this manifestation of the divine Idea to become more full, faithful and complete. To that end men's faces must be turned away from shadows to the true Light, to God Himself; and the task of the educator is to bring about this turning, and to make sure that it has genuinely taken place, through the growth in his pupil's soul of real likeness to the divine Idea.

It is unnecessary to point out how grievously our current conceptions about education come short of this noble vision of its functions and possibilities, and of the faculties within the soul which aid it and make it fruitful.

IV. *There never will be a good man who has not from his childhood been used to play amid things of beauty and to make of them a joy and a study.*[1]

There could not be a more downright and insistent enunciation of the great Platonic principle that goodness and beauty are inextricably connected, that you cannot have the one without the other, and that, from the point of view of the development of right character, early education and a suitable early environment are of supreme importance.

If a child's parents are careful that he shall have every opportunity of companying with that which is beautiful, and of finding comfort and joy in such things : if they see to it that his education embodies this element as of first importance : then there is solid reason to hope that as the child grows up, he will show himself discontented until he gains a full measure of communion with the divine and eternal Beauty. There will spring up within his soul the thirst for finding God in His own chosen setting of natural beauty. Such a man will become a lover of the mountains and the sea ; for he will have found that there is a strange quality of power in all such beauty—a power for the expression of God to human souls in a manner in which He is not expressed amongst sordid and ugly surroundings.

We have to realize quite definitely that the Ideal City, the Kingdom of God, can *never* be an ugly place. We have to be solidly and practically convinced that God is Beauty, and that slum surroundings are actually denying to the children

[1] *Republic*, 557.

born therein not merely the chance of health but the chance of goodness and of the knowledge of God. We have to recognize that although there are many brought up amid scenes of natural beauty who seem to lack goodness and Godlikeness, yet such men start with an immense natural advantage in the search for God and for God's Kingdom. Above all, we have to realize that part of the inalienable birthright of every child is an environment, and an education, which bring him into living contact with Beauty, and breed in him the power of appreciating it aright.

V. Plato was perfectly well acquainted with the fact that there exist in the world many false ideas about education and its functions. In his own day, as we find abundantly emphasized in his Dialogues, there were any number of false educational systems, professing to give the pupil not merely knowledge but character also, and yet in reality leading him into a maze of quackery and falsehood.

Therefore Plato regarded it as an essential part of his whole attitude to life that he should become and remain an educational reformer. Over and over again he insists that the most important thing for individual or community is that they should *learn* aright—learn to think rightly about God, about the relationships between man and God, about the vast enterprise of carrying out the will of God in the creation of Godlikeness amongst men, about all the complex readjustments that the creation of such Godlikeness will make needful

in the relationships between man and man in an ideally-organized community. In a sense—and a very real sense—the whole Platonic philosophy is the working out of a new educational system and the expression of a new educational outlook. And running through it all is the conviction that the whole future of mankind depends upon what we set before us as our ideal in education.

That knowledge only which is of Reality and of the unseen can make the soul look upwards.[1] False systems of education must be destroyed, false ideals in education must be refuted ; and by hook or by crook men in the mass must be brought to understand that there is only one thing really important, not merely in the sphere of education but in all of life, namely that we should come to see Truth and Reality, to behold the eternal Ideas in their beauty and goodness, to see God.

Once men have been brought to that Vision, with an effectiveness which shows itself in lives transformed into an ever-deepening likeness to the Ideas of beauty and goodness which they contemplate, all problems are solved ; for such lives cannot but spend themselves with dynamic success in the endeavour to strip away the coverings which hide the perfect manifestation of beauty and goodness in the world around them.

Thus the one great object, not merely of philosophy, but of statesmanship, is the development of a right system of education, which shall bring men actually and effectively to the Beatific Vision.

Salvation, in the deepest and widest sense,

[1] *Republic*, 529.

comes both to individual and to community from the apprehension of the divine Ideas, of God Himself. The progress and perfection of the race depend upon the knowledge, the experience, the continuing vision of what God really is. In this ever-expanding life of contact with God there is the stuff and fact of eternal being. It has had its origin long before birth, in the life of the soul with God in the heavenly sphere ; and such an incident as death can never affect it. It has in it the miraculous power of satisfying its own thirst, the thirst for God, yet of making that thirst perpetually more eager, till the soul is rapt into perfect communion with God beyond this life.

This creative Vision of unseen reality is a thing which is essentially practical in nature. It results in lives which are filled with the inextinguishable urge of the divine will for the creation of goodness and beauty in the world around them. The man who has seen the Vision is filled with the sense of safety and peace ; for he dwells for ever in the realm of perfect truth and love, where God dwells ; and yet his life is a fermenting and expanding—perhaps even an explosive—power amongst men, because he is filled with the divine creative force, and is driven by the divine creative will.

In all this realm of thought Christianity and Platonism march side by side. They are one army of truth.

VI. There is a famous saying of one of the greatest head masters in the history of English education—Edward Thring of Uppingham—to the effect that ' secular education is an expensive

method of giving brains to the devil.' Plato holds what is essentially the same view, and expresses it very forcibly in various passages of the *Republic*, for example, *The most gifted minds, when they are wrongly educated, become pre-eminently bad.*[1]

Education to Plato is above all the education of the soul ; for the whole end and aim of it is to introduce the spirit of man to the knowledge of ideal truth. Education exists in order that it may lead the pupil to the Beatific Vision of eternal reality, of God. Apart from that great end it has for Plato no meaning. It is a vain and disastrous enterprise resulting in the making of men 'pre-eminently bad.'

Many of us have the same conviction regarding education to-day ; but we lack the courage with which Plato and Thring put that conviction into words. The real aim of education is the training of character ; and recent history, especially in connection with the war, makes it abundantly clear that the imparting of knowledge to men is actually the source of acute danger to humanity as a whole unless it is accompanied by a genuinely effective training of the will, the character, the spirit.

There is a familiar saying of a great modern scientist to the effect that the discovery of the means of harnessing atomic energy will be a tragedy against which we should pray God most earnestly to protect mankind, unless that discovery be accompanied by a development in the moral sphere rendering mankind capable of using the new power aright. This saying sums up the whole situation. Secular education—though this

[1] *Republic*, 491.

is an unsatisfactory name for the thing—is a force leading to immense increases in knowledge and in the ability of man to control his environment through the astute manipulation of the natural laws which he has investigated. But unless there is a correspondingly real and definite advance in the moral nature of humanity, the new capabilities are turned against man's life, becoming merely novel and incredibly efficient tools of destruction ready to the hand of the ancient destructive instincts.

There is great talk nowadays of disarmament; but disarmament will be a mere blind until the spirits of men are turned away from individual and national selfishness and aggression. However effectively disarmament may be carried out, highly industrialized communities will always be able at short notice to improvise the means of supplying themselves with weapons of destruction, by bringing into employment their scientific knowledge and equipment. The world will never be safe from attacks upon the very life of mankind, and attacks which become yearly more dangerous as our knowledge of natural law increases, until we have recovered Plato's conviction that education must be an education of the spirit and the character, designed in order to bring men under the spell of the eternal Idea of goodness and beauty: and that otherwise it is not merely no education at all, but an active and terrible danger to the life of the community.

Plato would probably have looked with deep concern upon all our modern machine-made civilization, as being the product on a vast scale

of the wrong type of education (he always used the word education in the widest sense, as signifying any training for life). He would have pointed out that vast populations have been created, and are being kept alive, through scientific knowledge and the adroit application of such knowledge, but that the training of character and spirit has not kept pace with scientific knowledge, so that men are still ruled by the fierce ancient instincts of acquisition and combat. And he would have brought to our notice the fact that as a result of this false education the life of our modern communities is continually threatened with breakdown upon a colossal scale, which breakdown may destroy tens of millions of lives; and that hence we are driven to stave off the ever more imminent danger by ever more desperate makeshifts, and makeshifts which are always becoming more and more obviously ineffective.

VII. Even in Plato's time the eternal question was raised—the question which we still discuss with such acrimony to-day: Can you make a man good by law? With his unerring insight into human nature Plato perceived quite clearly that the answer to this question must be in the negative, that there is only one pathway of virtue, the freely-made choice of good for its own sake, which comes because the soul has seen the beauty of goodness in the Beatific Vision of ideal reality.

They are always imagining that by legislation they will make an end of frauds and other rascalities, not knowing that they are in reality cutting off the heads of a hydra.[1]

[1] *Republic*, 426.

If men are to be good they must be shown the ideal beauty and goodness, behind the broken and partial manifestations of those sovereign Ideas (which, as Plato insists, are not two but one) as they are to be seen in the world around us. As they behold and recognize ideal beauty and goodness men will learn to love them : and this love will breed goodness within them, without compulsion and through the irresistible attraction of its own glory. They will spontaneously become good ; for their lives will be modelled upon the beauty of the deathless Ideas which they behold.

Thus, in the conception of Plato, men can never be made good by legislation, but only by the right kind of training. It is all a question of education. Nothing except sound and true education can create the right kind of character in the citizens of any State, and the question of education is the most fundamental of all political issues.

Here again we perceive not merely the Platonic *preparatio evangelica* but also the astonishingly modern nature of the Platonic system of thought. The Christian realizes the immense importance of education, partly because of the supreme value which Christ set upon childhood, and partly because he knows that God has shown to man once and for all in the Cross that His way of creating goodness in the world is by freedom and the educative power of love, persuading, subduing, directing the most hardened wills.

It is only within the last century and a half that we have awakened once more to the meaning and value of this testimony, which comes both from

Plato and from Christianity, as to the sovereign worth of childhood and the supreme importance of right education in the national life. Even yet we do not really believe in education. We are still prone to regard it as something which, though good for some people, is an expensive luxury, or positively harmful, in the case of those belonging to races or classes different from our own. For this reason, because our belief in education is not firm and right, and also because we find it still possible to conceive of and to advocate an 'education' which does not include an effort to educate the soul (and which in some cases deliberately excludes that effort), we are apt to take refuge in ill-considered and ill-founded schemes for the improvement of humanity by means of enlightened legislation. Such schemes are generally drafted without any regard at all to the fact that legislation is a degrading farce (because it is a forcible dragooning of the people) unless and until it is prepared for, and accompanied, and conserved by carefully-planned education.

VIII. *He who has abundant learning, and is skilful in many arts, but does not possess the knowledge of the Best, but is under some other guidance, will make, as he deserves, a sorry voyage: he will, I believe, hurry through the brief space of human life, pilotless in mid-ocean. . . . When the soul rushes in pursuit of wealth or bodily strength or anything else, not having knowledge of the Best, so much the more is she likely to meet with misfortune.* [1]

[1] *Alcibiades, II,* 147.

Plato is absolutely convinced that nothing but disaster awaits us if we set forth on the voyage of life without a rightly-formed conception of the good, the beautiful and the true—that is, of the very nature of God—and of the fact that in the cosmic purpose our lives are given to us that they may become, under the conditions of time and space, due manifestations of these eternal realities.

Without genuine education, in this sense, we may gain wealth, honour, success, but our souls must shrivel in disease, and our State can never be strong and beautiful.

IX. *The opinion about the honourable and the just and good and their opposites, which is true and confirmed by reason, is a divine principle. . . . Only the Statesman and the good legislator, having the inspiration of the royal muse, can implant this opinion, and he only in the rightly educated.*[1]

This passage forms a vigorous affirmation of three main principles in the Platonic system of thought.

In the first place, the sense of values in a man's soul, his appreciation of the good and the beautiful (and the appreciation of these divine things means, to Plato, the sustained effort to live by them and live like them), is an actual manifestation in the soul of eternal reality. It is the soul's heritage from its life in the heavenly sphere before it was born into this world. It is an indwelling divine capacity, which in many is dim and

[1] *Statesman*, 309.

unawakened, but in some sense is present in all.

In the second place, the arousing of this capacity into full activity—the awakening of the soul to its birthright in a right sense of the eternal values and a determined effort to live in accordance with those eternal values—is the function of true education.

In the third place, it is the highest duty of true Statesmanship to see to it that the right type of education is put into operation, in order that this work of awakening may be rightly done.

X. *Let us follow the scent like hounds, and go in pursuit of Beauty.*[1]

There is perhaps no passage in all Plato which is more characteristic of the inner spirit of the man than this. In the course of his lifelong endeavour to discover the true way of life for man, he has been brought back again and again to the necessity of the right kind of education. But education to Plato means—first, last and all the time—education of the spirit for communion with eternal reality ; and eternal reality, in its brightest and most compelling guise, is beauty ; for beauty and goodness are to Plato one single supreme Idea, and an Idea which shines in our dark world most clearly through beauty.

Therefore education must deal with the training of the soul to appreciate aright the meaning of the beauty which is also goodness and the goodness which is also beauty ; for the two are one.

[1] *Laws*, 654.

Hence this lovely figure—we who are concerned about true education are to be like hounds in the pursuit of beauty.

WEALTH

I. The idea of the Two Nations, one of which knows nothing of the way in which the other lives, came into the world twenty-two centuries before the time of Disraeli. For Plato said, *Any city, however small, is in fact divided into two, one the city of the poor, the other of the rich ; these are at war with one another.*[1] Plato perceived perfectly clearly the deep cleavage which has appeared so patently in our own day, and has rent to pieces the old régime of power based on money in more than one country. Here again we discern his amazing power of insight into the fundamental problems of humanity.

Plato's own solution of the problem constituted by the existence of the two cities within one was resolutely to sever the connection between power and money. The Guardians of his Republic were to possess no money at all. They were to be forbidden even to touch it, because money by its very nature defiles him who is striving to fulfil within himself the divine ideal of likeness in character to God. They were to have all power, but no money.

Plato's ideal in this respect is obviously close to that of Christ. Christ also perceived clearly and

[1] *Republic*, 422.

felt bitterly the miseries of the poor. He understood the cleavage between the two cities within one. He also hated money, and taught very plainly that the man is lost who tries to serve money as well as the divine Ideal. Historically, the Platonic teaching regarding the worthlessness of money prepared the way with power for the Christian teaching—which we follow so little—regarding the blessedness of the poor, and the duty of serving them in their need.

II. There is one element in the *Republic* of Plato which appears to us in the midst of our modern scientific and materialized civilization more quixotically Utopian perhaps than any other, namely his refusal to allow his Guardians even to touch money. They are to keep themselves entirely clear from its contaminating influence, and even the family is sacrificed to attain this end, because men with families wish to amass money for the sake of their children. *The diviner metal is within them, and they have therefore no need of the dross which is current among men.*[1]

Plato knew by bitter personal experience what fatal havoc is played in the State by the love of money. In his description of democracy in the *Republic*—a description which seems to us almost grotesquely pessimistic until we remember the kind of thing which actually went on in the Greek democracies of Plato's own time—this great statesman (for such he was) affirms his conviction that popular government is ruined by the temptations to corruption which accompany it, by

[1] *Republic*, 416.

the selfish yearning of all classes for material wealth.

Therefore with categorical insistence he lays down the principle that, *The love of wealth and the spirit of moderation cannot exist together in citizens of the same State.*[1]

It is an affirmation, couched in terms suiting its political context, of the truth enunciated by Jesus Christ four centuries later, " Ye cannot serve both God and Mammon." For Plato insists that the only way in which his Guardians, and the citizens of his ideal City as a whole, can become what they should be, and show forth the likeness to the divine Idea which is the end of their being, is through the 'service of God,' the contemplation of the Beatific Vision, and the steady embodiment of what they have seen, in their own lives. Such experience, and such transformed lives, he insists, are utterly impossible so long as men's minds are distracted by the love for and the search after money.

It is another striking instance of the Platonic *preparatio evangelica.*

FREEDOM

I. Sooner or later every idealist—that is, every one who tries to act on his belief that there is a solid and permanent meaning of goodness, truth and beauty behind the universe, and who attempts to put into practice principles formulated in accordance with this universal meaning—will find

[1] *Republic*, 555.

himself imperiously confronted with the fact that public opinion is against him. He will become aware, perhaps very painfully aware, that 'the many' have lower conceptions than his: that they laugh at him, and (what is much more offensive) at his principles: that they ostracize him: that they are capable of going the length of persecuting, and even of destroying him.

He will be driven back—and if he is a true idealist, he will be content in the fact that he is so driven back—upon the inner realization that, come what may, God knows the truth. If he is lucky, there may be a few good men who see his actions in their true significance. If so, then the opinion of such men is in truth the only form of public opinion which matters to him a single straw. If not, then he is satisfied with the fact that in his own heart he knows that he is right: and that in any case God knows it.

As Socrates puts it in the *Crito*,[1] *Why should we care about the opinion of the many? Good men, and they are the only persons who are worth considering, will think of these things truly as they occurred.*

There is a wealth of stalwart courage and comfort in these words. They are a trumpet-call to the following of truth. They are also an enunciation of the foundation-doctrine of all freedom and all progress—that men should follow truth at all costs, fearlessly trusting to the guidance of the God of all Truth, and caring nothing for what becomes of themselves, so long as Truth is magnified. Where this spirit of undaunted truth-

[1] 44.

following exists, there liberty and progress are not merely assured for the future, but are a present fact.

II. *Men of Athens, I honour and love you; but I shall obey God rather than you.*[1]

It hardly needs saying that this is one of the most notable affirmations of freedom ever made by the Spirit of God speaking through man. It is an utterance which rings for us with a clear and definite foretelling of the New Testament: and not only of the New Testament, but of the long and splendid witness given by men of every subsequent age to the inalienable right possessed by man as man to liberty of thought, of speech and of conscience. The brave men of every age and nation who have found it needful in vindication of the truth to defy authority, to catch at God's skirts, and so to make the tyrant afraid, even in their deaths, have here their second greatest exemplar. Here, under the fierce glare of history, concentrated upon the most brilliant community of men the world has ever seen, in its most brilliant age, we see this lonely misshapen old philosopher calmly and deliberately—and very courageously, in spite of his loneliness—laying down a principle which is to be of absolute authority, and of supreme importance, for all future ages of humanity. It is the principle of spiritual freedom—the principle that God must be obeyed at all costs, whatever the State may say. That principle of spiritual freedom is the root and

[1] *Apology*, 29.

foundation of all other forms of freedom, political, constitutional, social, religious.

As Socrates stands before his Athenian judges, respectfully bidding them do their worst, telling them that he will not budge an inch from his chosen pathway of the following of God, because he knows what God's will is and he must at all costs obey that will, there comes amongst men, expressed in words of the grandest beauty and through a personality of supreme authority, freedom incarnate. And such freedom, as it spreads out from sphere to sphere of human life, controlling ever wider and wider areas of association, and always in closest conjunction with its sister-principle of co-operation, is in itself the very soul of progress.

III. It is to be noted that Socrates' immensely important vindication of the freedom of the human spirit, which has been the fountain-head of an ever wider and wider extension of the principle of freedom, and therefore of progress, is couched in definitely religious terms. He claims his right to follow the bidding of God rather than of man. He stands with his life in his hand for the truth, because the truth is a divine thing. It is the Will of God, the very heart of God. This is the reason why, as we look upon Socrates there before his judges, we see also a Greater than Socrates, standing before another judge.

If we truly hold that the Spirit of God speaks in the hearts of good men in every age who have earnestly desired to find the truth of God : and if we are convinced that the Spirit of God is One,

and was perfectly present in and expressed through Jesus Christ, then we shall believe that in looking at great and good men here and there down through history (or even in our own day) we may see the reflection, the manifestation of Christ. In other words, we still hold the Platonic idealism : we believe in the Divine Ideas, which are perfect goodness, truth, beauty, joy, and love. But these are for us no mere abstract qualities—though indeed they were never that for Plato. They are a Personality ; they are Christ. Therefore in looking at these great and good men of past ages (and also of our own age), we shall look for, and surely find, facets and aspects of the Eternal Christ. And it is possible that, our New Testament records being exceedingly brief, and therefore of necessity giving a mere sketch of the Supreme Personality—and a sketch which has passed through the minds of observers who at the time they made their observations were notoriously unspiritual and unsympathetic with their Master—we shall find here and there in history personalities which, under given circumstances and aspects of life, can show us new depths of Christlikeness, and therefore new truths concerning the Light of the Eternal Christ.

Such fresh aspects of Christlikeness will always be tested and approved by our study of the Gospels themselves, and also by the witness of the Spirit of God, who now and for ever reveals the things of Christ to those that seek to know more of Him.

For example, when we want to know what Christ would have been like under the conditions

of life in thirteenth-century Italy, we look at St. Francis ; and from our knowledge of Christ in the Gospels, which provides us with the criterion whereby to judge, and through the enlightenment given by God's Holy Spirit in our hearts if we truly desire to find the truth of Christ, we are able to say that this was the Light of the Eternal Christ shining under the conditions of life at that time.

Similarly with many of the great saints and prophets of the past, and also with some amongst our contemporaries, we can look at these men, and say with perfect confidence that God is revealing to us through their lives what the Light of Christ was like then and there in history, or under the conditions in which we live in our own day. Our study of history, and our intercourse with our fellow-men, thus become a constant acquiring of more and more knowledge about the universal and Eternal Christ under the conditions of various ages and areas of the world's surface.

God is a Spirit, the Spirit of Love and of Truth who was perfectly incarnate in Christ. Wherever in any age or place we see real love and genuine truth, we see the manifestation of God, the God who was incarnate in Christ. Therefore even in the ages before the coming of Christ, where we see this Spirit shown forth in human lives, there we see the forecasting of the Christ that was to be : we see Christ, dimly perhaps and inadequately, but yet in a manner which brings us the deepest joy.

Thus if we would see and hear the Spirit of God, the Light of the Eternal Christ, in the Athens

of the great age, we shall picture in our minds the aged Socrates before his judges, and hear him say :

Men of Athens, I honour and love you ; but I shall obey God rather than you. . . . While I have life and strength I shall never cease from the practice and teaching of philosophy, exhorting anyone whom I meet, and saying to him after my manner, You, my friend—a citizen of the great and mighty and wise city of Athens—are you not ashamed of heaping up the greatest amount of money and honour and reputation, and caring so little about wisdom and truth and the greatest improvement of the soul, which you never regard or heed at all ? [1]

These words are more especially Christ like, because we find in them quite clearly expressed the fact that the motive behind Socrates' activity, which led him to unpopularity and death, was not merely the following of God's guidance and the obeying of His will, but also (or rather therefore) the desire to save his fellow-citizens from wasting their lives and squandering their God-given opportunities. In other words, the motive behind Socrates' zeal for truth at all costs was a redemptive one. He was seeking to save that which was lost. He was striving to impart to other men the vision of spiritual reality which should turn them from illusions to the truth of God.

Socrates clearly perceives that God is leading him not only to the service of men, but to the service of men at the cost of his own life. Therefore his faithfulness unto death is a foreshadowing not merely of freedom, and so of the essential prerequisite of all progress, but also of the Cross. In

[1] *Apology*, 29.

the old philosopher we may see the Light of the Eternal Christ manifesting this eternal Cross ; and seeing this, we may gain courage to take up our own cross also, and to follow Christ.

IV. Even in the most enlightened and most brilliant of all States—Athens in her great age—the truth was dangerous to the truth-teller ; and the divine impulse which made Socrates give himself unstintingly that men might know the truth, led him straight to his death—a death died for freedom, for God, for truth, for the love and service of humanity.

By that death, in which the Light of God shone forth so plainly, there was gained for mankind a boon infinitely more precious than Socrates dreamed of—that keen-spirited, forward-reaching spirit of freedom which refuses to compromise God's truth, and in so doing, even at the greatest sacrifice of all, lays the foundation of future progress towards fuller and deeper freedom, making possible also wider and more thorough-going co-operation between free individuals and free communities ; for where there is dominance founded on force, not only is freedom denied, but the possibility of co-operation in a genuine spirit of good-will is destroyed.

Thus when we hear Socrates say to his judges, *Either acquit me or not ; but whichever you do, understand, O men of Athens, that I shall never alter my ways, not even if I have to die many times*,[1] we are not only listening to a voice asserting for the healing of humanity the truth that conscience must be

[1] *Apology*, 30.

followed at all costs : we are not only permitted to hear the Spirit of the Eternal Christ witnessing to the fact that men are to be served by suffering, non-resisting good-will, which even dies at their hands to save them : but we are present at the very birth of spiritual liberty, the true origin of every other form of liberty ; we behold the launching of the great and undying enterprise of Freedom, through the determination of one man, that come what may God shall be served and men taught His truth as He directs.

V. *Many a man has found his slaves better in every way than brethren or sons, and many times they have saved the lives and property of their masters and their whole house—such tales are well known. . . . The right treatment of slaves is to behave properly to them, and to do to them, if possible, even more justice than to those who are our equals ; for he who naturally and genuinely reverences justice and hates injustice is discovered in his dealings with any class of men to whom he can easily be unjust.*[1]

Plato is sometimes reproached because in planning his Ideal State he did not decree the extinction of slavery, but thought of slave-labour as still necessary in order that the requisite amount of leisure might be secured for the citizens.

But Plato laid down principles which, if followed, would lead automatically to the ending of slavery. In his reverence for genuine righteousness of heart, which is no respecter of persons, Plato said that men must be especially anxious and careful to be just to slaves ; and if so, it is obvious that

[1] *Laws*, 776–7.

sooner or later they will discover that it is not just to keep them as slaves any longer !

THE IDEA OF PROGRESS

I. The idea and fact of progress in Western civilization may be traced directly back to Plato's conception of the Ideal City. He brought into the minds of men a divine discontent with things as they are, and the vision of a higher and better state of human life, to which every pure spirit must eternally strive. Four hundred years later this magnificent conception—the conception of the practical Utopia—was dynamically reinterpreted by Christ's conception of the Kingdom of God, and through the loyalty evoked by the personality of Christ Himself the Platonic-Christian Utopia, which God wills to have men make actual upon earth, became a great revolutionary force for the carrying out of the divine purposes amongst men.

There are many amazing parallels between Christ's ideal of the Kingdom and Plato's ideal of the perfect City : *In heaven there is laid up a pattern of the City of which we are the founders; he who desires may behold that pattern, and beholding may take up his abode therein.*[1] *Look at the City which is within.*[2] As one reads such words, one realizes that in Plato more than in any other forerunner of Christ, more perhaps than in the greatest Hebrew prophets, there was the *anima naturaliter Christiana*, a soul whose native bent was towards the living

[1] *Republic*, 592. [2] *Republic*, 591.

truth in Christ. One realizes also the immense debt which humanity owes to this old Greek, as a preparer of the way for progress—for the never-satisfied striving of the human spirit after a state of the soul and of society that shall be more in accord with the will of God than the present state.

II. Plato has perfectly clear ideas as to what it is that makes a State great and prosperous. He holds strongly, for instance, that Pericles, whom we are still inclined to think of and write about as one of the world's greatest statesmen, was in reality a materialist and an exploiter, who corrupted Athens instead of beautifying and ennobling her, as he is commonly supposed to have done. "He was the first who gave the people pay, and made them idle and cowardly, and encouraged them in the love of talk and of money. He made them more savage than he received them, and their savageness was shown towards himself."

There is a stark idealism here, an uncompromising resolve to judge the actions of men, and to evaluate their reputation, by nothing but ultimate standards. This idealism finds its most remarkable expression in the scathing condemnation:

These (false) statesmen have filled the city full of harbours and docks and walls and revenues and all that, and have left no room for justice and temperance.[1]

Such words bring strongly to our minds, on the one hand, the fierce invectives of the greatest Hebrew prophets against the false policies and the brazen social injustices of the politicians who

[1] *Gorgias*, 518.

ruled the ancient Jewish State, and on the other hand the inexorable standard of right which is established by Jesus Christ, for the State as well as for the individual, when he declares, "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness."

It is a teaching far more obviously needful in our own day of swollen material progress than in that age of the greatness of Athens—an age which we look back upon as realizing with almost miraculous success ideals of beauty and achievement, artistic, intellectual and social, after which we ourselves aspire in vain.

This Platonic teaching is an eternally true asseveration of the fact that genuine progress is only to be achieved as we seek first to realize in our state-life the Kingdom of God.

III. The death of Socrates had taught Plato that truth is so deeply to be loved, and so faithfully to be followed, that to be naked, defenceless, persecuted, but with truth on our side, is infinitely better than to be popular, famous and successful, but with truth against us.

Socrates is represented in the *Gorgias* [1] as declaring—and the words may be taken as summing up in Plato's mind the meaning of his master's life—*My inheritance is the truth.* That declaration was no mere uttering of pious aspiration. It was something that put into words for Socrates' disciple the whole spirit of the greatest man whom he had ever known, or whom anyone else was to know for many weary centuries.

As we look back, we can recognize that in this

[1] 472.

principle, as practically applied through the life and death of Socrates, there comes into the world a new and most precious possession, the faithfulness to the inner voice within a man's soul which (especially in the sphere of religion) has alone made progress possible. Always there are reactionary elements in human society, which are interested in keeping things as they are, and therefore in crushing out any new truth before it has a chance of setting their comfortable world on fire. Unless the reformer is prepared to die for his inner inheritance of truth, as Socrates did, there will be no spiritual and moral progress, and therefore no true progress in any sphere or of any kind. Liberty is only to be built up on a foundation of blood and tears. It will not be enduring unless it is strong enough to stand fast against a thousand storms of persecution. Therefore liberty cannot exist without men who are willing to lay down their lives for it, as Socrates did.

Freedom of thought, freedom of speech, above all freedom of conscience, have been bought for us by the faithfulness of great men in the past who have accepted and lived by this Socratic-Platonic law of faithfulness at all costs to man's inheritance of truth.

The Spirit of God, in making this revelation to the Greeks so long ago, made progress possible for our race.

IV. At the very heart of man's belief, not merely in a rational and ordered universe (and therefore in the possibility of our apprehending and learning to apply natural law), but in the

possibility of progress, is a faith in the unity and sovereignty of the divine Will. For if men believe that there are many divine wills, which at times may oppose each other, as the gods in Homer oppose each other, there can be no faith either in the universe as an intelligible system, or in a purpose behind the universe with which man may set himself to co-operate ; whilst if we have no faith in the existence of any will or purpose behind the universe, it is obvious that there can be no profit in endeavouring to bring about improvement in a state of things which is governed by blind chance.

Realizing this, Plato is entirely convinced of the supremacy of the divine Will :

God, holding in His hand the beginning, middle and end of all that is, travels in a straight line towards the accomplishment of His end.[1]

To the primitive mind the whole world is caprice. Each tree that waves in the wind is possessed and moved by a different spirit. Even in the higher polytheistic faiths the variety of gods causes fatal confusion. How, for instance, are men to know which god to worship in any given eventuality? But Plato has reached the immensely important conclusion that all that is, is controlled by the Will of a self-consistent God ; and this means that man may work for progress, which is the steadily developing fulfilment under human conditions of God's Will, with confidence (so to speak) that the universe will consistently support him. For, as Spengler says, ' to speak of the Will of God is a pleonasm, God is all Will ' ;

[1] *Laws*, 715.

and progress is attained as individual and community set themselves in line with that Will.

THE IDEAL STATESMAN

I. *Our Guardians, as far as men may be, should be true worshippers of God and like Him.*[1]

Here is another dazzling flash of the intuitive genius of Plato. The wardens and statesmen of his ideal commonwealth—the philosopher-kings of this highest Greek ideal of the Kingdom of God, which is also an apotheosis of the Greek City-state—are to be like God in their character, and that character is to be moulded in them by true adoration of God as He is.

Plato was no mere theorist. He knew the realities of political life. He had striven himself to build in actual practice an ideal commonwealth ; and he knew the appalling perversity and unmanageableness of human nature as it is seen in ' public life.' He knew the low motives, the hatreds and jealousies, the mean ambitions, the reckless selfishnesses, which move both individual statesmen and great masses of men in the conduct of state affairs. He wrote about these things caustically and realistically ; and, both in Athens and in Sicily, he experienced them directly for himself.

Yet in all seriousness he can give it as his considered opinion, after all his harsh and unpleasant experience, that the only right kind of statesman

[1] *Republic*, 383.

is a religious man, whose ambition it is to make his religion work practically and dynamically in the affairs of the State. The best man at government, in Plato's opinion, is the man who knows and worships God, and whose character and everyday practice is definitely moulded on the ambition to be like God and to do God's will in the world.

This is a great and noble judgment, and one which is clearly of as deep significance in our own day as in that of Plato himself. It means that the ideals of the Kingdom of God, and the character of the true citizen of that Kingdom, are to be the working force behind all public life. It means that the will of the God of Love is to be the will also of the men who are responsible for government, for the practical issues of politics and administration. It means that whoever is responsible for the conduct of public affairs is to have this ideal and no other before him, the ideal that in every action and every policy he should be like God in character, loving, simple-hearted, humble, entirely true and pure.

Some of the incidental features of Plato's ideal Republic cannot but grievously offend us. They are obviously transient, arising out of and belonging to the conditions of one far-distant age only. Yet in his conceptions of government there is something permanent, and unshakable for ever. Government is to be conducted in the light of God's purposes by those who are like God in character, who share so far as men may God's will, see with His eyes, judge with His wisdom and impartiality, are in all things moulded on Him,

existing only that His Will may be done through them for the benefit of the state as a whole.

Moreover the aim of such a government, so conducted and by such men, is to make their type of character—the character that is truly Godlike—universal throughout the state, or as we should say with a wider vision, throughout the whole world. There can be no rest, no contentment, till all the citizens of the world-community are men like this, men whose character is moulded on the divine character, and who live together in peace and brotherhood because their character is so moulded.

The creation of such a world-community of God-like citizens is the end of statesmanship. It is an end wider and infinitely more distant than that for which Plato thought and lived, and yet Plato's ideal is of the same nature. It is included in the wider ideal, which is an extension of the Platonic. The ideal of the universal Kingdom of God embraces and carries forward to perfection the inspired hope of the old Greek sage.

II. Plato sees everything *sub specie aeternitatis*. The soul, and the life of the soul in relation to eternal reality, are to him the only really significant facts in the universe: and therefore, with uncompromising logic, he adjusts the everyday occupations and concerns of mankind, including even so essentially sublunary a pursuit as politics, to these great fundamental facts:

This knowledge of the natures and habits of men's souls will be of the greatest use in that art which has the

management of them ; and that art, if I am not mistaken, is politics.[1]

Since man is a spiritual being who is undergoing training in this world in order that he may learn to behold the Beatific Vision of eternal truth : and since that training can only be given in a society, a State, Plato—as he shows us both in the *Laws* and the *Republic*—is stalwartly convinced that the politician must primarily be a spiritual man. He must comprehend that he is engaged upon a spiritual enterprise, that his energies and endeavours are to be directed primarily towards the cultivating of the right life of the soul in those for whom he is responsible, and that what are generally regarded as political questions are wholly secondary in importance to these spiritual considerations.

It is an ideal which to our day appears wildly unpractical, possibly because we have not yet attained to the wisdom of Plato, and of the Founder of the Kingdom of God.

III. Beauty, as Plato holds, is to be the end and aim of the State, and therefore of every one who is responsible in any fashion for the corporate life of the State. Every element of that life is to be aligned with and judged by eternal standards —by the beauty which is not only outward and visible beauty (though it is that), but is also goodness and truth in the moral and intellectual worlds : and is above all else beauty of the spirit, likeness to God.

I consider that the true lawgiver, like an archer, aims

[1] *Laws*, 650.

only at that on which some eternal beauty is always attending, and dismisses everything else, whether wealth or any other benefit, when separated from virtue.[1]

The growth amongst the citizens of this beauty which is also goodness is the only thing that really matters in the eyes of him who is a true statesman. Prosperity, increase in population, success in warfare, the foundation of imposing public works, and above all rapidly expanding economic well-being, through growth of trade and industry, are to the mind of Plato totally irrelevant considerations. They are more than this ; for he clearly sees that wealth, power and empire are exceedingly likely to divert the mind of the State as a whole, and of its individual citizens, from the only thing which is really of any importance at all—the fulfilment through corporate and individual life of the divine will for Goodness and Beauty.

IV. *Those who love and embrace that which they know to be righteous and good are to be called wise, even although, in the words of the proverb, they know neither how to read nor how to swim ; and to them, as to men of sense, authority is to be committed.*[2]

This is the great Platonic definition of two things with regard to which the mind of this supreme thinker was constantly occupied : in the first place, the nature of true knowledge, and in the second place the nature of the ideal ruler in the ideal State.

Both knowledge and fitness to rule are seen to be an affair, not of mental calibre and equipment,

[1] *Laws*, 705. [2] *Laws*, 689.

but of moral character and of spiritual experience. Wisdom—true knowledge—is the acquaintanceship of the soul with goodness ; and this acquaintanceship is no mere intellectual grasp of the connotation of the term goodness, but a passion of the soul for goodness itself, and a living communion with the Idea of Goodness, with God Himself, through all the details of everyday life.

Wisdom, in other words, is the progressive growth of likeness in a man's soul and life to the Idea of Goodness, which is also the Idea of Beauty. It is (as we Christians should put it) a steady progress towards Christlikeness—a steady fulfilment of the standards set up in Christ's parable of the Last Judgment.

Therefore also the criterion of fitness for rule, in the case of him who aspires to bear political and social responsibility in the State, is the right condition of his spirit as evidenced through a life of practical manifestation of the Idea of Goodness—which means, for us, a life of practical Christlikeness.

The standards of Plato are set unattainably high.

V. *When there is hurt, the legislator must, as far as he can, make the hurt good by law, and save that which is ruined, and raise up that which is fallen, and make that which is dead or wounded whole. . . . The law must always seek to win over the doers and sufferers of the several hurts from feelings of enmity to those of friendship. . . . Of unjust hurts we may heal as many as are*

capable of being healed, regarding them as diseases of the soul.[1]

This is a noble expression of the aims and principles of State-justice. Its purpose is to be definitely redemptive. It is to consider the motive rather than any outward aspect of action. It is to regard its function as that of the healing of the diseases of the soul ; and it must therefore proceed by the methods of regeneration, through the careful up-building of the good, rather than by the methods of retribution, which concentrate upon punishment for the evil.

Above all, in Plato's ideal, justice is to work by the method of reconciliation, seeking always to create brotherhood and friendship where before there have been hatred and violence.

Thus conceived of, justice is indeed a divine thing ; and the State as the agency of justice is a true Kingdom of God.

THE IDEAL STATE

I. *In estimating the goodness of a State, we regard both the situation of the country and the order of the laws, considering that the mere preservation and continuance of life is not the most honourable thing for men, as the vulgar think, but the continuance of the best life.*[2]

In this most important passage Plato categorically and explicitly lays down his famous criterion whereby all political and social life is to be evaluated. That criterion is the criterion of the

[1] *Laws*, 862. [2] *Laws*, 707.

manner in which the corporate life of the community succeeds in manifesting the Idea of Goodness.

No State is to be considered successful and prosperous in which the life of the citizens is not definitely and systematically the 'best life.' The whole organization of the State is to be planned and worked to this end and to this end only—that its citizens (for it goes without saying that in Plato's system of thought the State exists for its citizens) may live in accordance with the highest expression of the Will of God, which is perfect goodness.

Nowadays, it is to be feared, we are nearly all 'vulgar,' as Plato phrases it; for how many citizens are to be found who can be honestly said to hold and to live by this ideal; and how many statesmen are governed by such 'unpractical' notions?

None the less the Platonic ideal for the State is there to be reckoned with. It is one of the greatest and noblest conceptions that has ever entered into the mind of man.

Christ's ideal of the Kingdom of God is also there to be reckoned with.

So too are the disastrous results of the modern attitude to the State—class-conflict growing ever more bitter: international warfare becoming ever more omnivorously murderous: and exploitation of nation by nation and race by race, which threatens ever more clearly gigantic tragedy in the future.

Amidst all this welter of force, folly and selfishness it is good that from time to time we should cast our glance back to the ancient ideals.

II. The State—Plato is unalterably convinced—is to be a Kingdom of God. God, the Idea of Goodness, the perfection of all love, beauty, goodness, truth, is to rule therein :

If States are to be named after their rulers, the true State ought to be called by the name of the God who rules over wise men.[1]

God's Will for the creation of His likeness amongst men is to be the corporate will of the State, which is to exist only in order that this Will may be fulfilled through it, and that each individual citizen may be enabled by means of the corporate existence of the State to live a better life, one nearer to God and more in accordance with His Will than would ever be possible without the State.

Hence the ideal State is to own its allegiance to its divine Ruler by taking His name, and calling itself ' God's Town.'

All this realm of thought is not merely an obvious and powerful *preparatio evangelica*, but is the embodiment and expression of an ideal to which all human progress still and for ever blindly and wistfully strives.

THE IDEAL PHILOSOPHER

There is to be found running through all the teaching of Plato, this great and permanent truth—the conviction that those whose wills are consciously moulded to the universal will, and who have a genuine hunger and thirst after righteous-

[1] *Laws*, 713.

ness, shall with inevitable and absolute certainty have their desires fulfilled.

The philosopher, holding converse with the divine order, becomes orderly and divine.[1]

If we dwell in contact with God, consciously subjecting our wills to His Will, and endeavouring through His grace to become as He would have us be : above all, if we practise His presence in the earnest devotion of our souls, then He will do His work in us, making us the men He would have us. In those who truly hunger and thirst after God and the likeness to God, the divine Idea of what a man should be will be gradually realized and manifested. Those who feast the eyes of their souls upon that Idea, laid up in the mind of God and perfectly expressed for us in Christ, are changed day by day into something more of Christlikeness, which means that the divine intention in giving them their lives is being fulfilled through them.

In this way the unseen world of reality has the power of projecting itself into the seen material world, and of actualizing itself in that world, by the spread of likeness to Christ. For love, forgiveness, humility, patience, these things are reality itself, the truth of God, the likeness of Christ ; and in so far as they are bred and increased in the lives of men, those lives fulfil God's Idea for them, and become (as Plato puts it) ' orderly and divine.'

In this sense we are all of us to become ' philosophers.'

[1] *Republic*, 500.

PLATONISM IN TOLSTOY

I. One of the most strikingly original of modern interpreters of the meaning of Christ and of the Christian Gospel was the great Russian prophet Tolstoy. Every now and again, in reading Tolstoy's writings, one comes across a passage which is strikingly Platonic, and which therefore forms an interesting example of the manner in which one of the greatest of modern thinkers formed in his mind, perhaps unconsciously, not merely a synthesis between Platonism and Christianity, but an expression through Christian terminology of Platonic truth, and through Platonic terminology of Christian truth.

Two or three instances of this process may be taken, from the great novel *Anna Karenina* : " If goodness has causes, it is not goodness ; if it has effects, a reward, it is not goodness either. So goodness is outside the chain of cause and effect." [1] This is a profoundly Platonic saying. It means that goodness is something absolute, something divine, something which enters this world of ' cause and effect ' (as Tolstoy calls it) from without, from another sphere of different and eternal values. Human goodness is an expression under the conditions of this world of the Idea of Goodness, the ultimate nature of God. It is unconditioned, as God, the Creator and Upholder of all things, is unconditioned ; otherwise it does not exist. Goodness that is in any sense bribed, even by hope of heaven or fear of hell, is thereby seen not to be goodness at all. This Light of the divine

[1] 895.

nature, unconditioned and absolute, is to be found burning in some measure within every human heart; there is no one so utterly depraved as to have no goodness, no love at all, in him. We may confidently believe, and we must act on the belief, that somewhere in every human heart, however faintly, this Light burns, and this expression of God is to be found. Therefore, as we go through the world, we shall learn from every one we meet (as Tolstoy, for instance, so often learnt from his peasants) fresh aspects of truth regarding the goodness and the love of God.

II. "By reason could I have arrived at knowing that I must love my neighbour and not oppress him? I was told that in my childhood, and I believed it gladly, for they told me what was already in my soul. But who discovered it? Not reason. Reason discovered the struggle for existence, and the law that requires us to oppress all who hinder the satisfaction of our desires. That is the deduction of reason. But loving one's neighbour reason could never discover, because it is irrational." [1]

Here is another evidence of Platonism in the mind of Tolstoy. It is a reflection of the Platonic doctrine of 'recollection.' There dwells in the soul an innate capacity for goodness and beauty, a capacity which is in essence recollection of communion held before the soul was born into this world with the Divine Reality of beauty and goodness. This recollection is not merely a functioning of the psychological faculty of

[1] *Anna Karenina*, 897.

memory. It is no merely intellectual endowment. It is a deep metaphysical fact. It is something which is stamped indelibly and for ever upon the soul, and which belongs to it by its own nature.

Obviously the Platonic idealism had deeply affected the great thinker and prophet who twenty-two centuries later could bear witness in this fashion to the handiwork of God in mankind.

III. Here is another instance of the same thing : " Don't all the theories of philosophy try by the path of thought, which is strange and not natural to man, to bring him to a knowledge of what he has known long ago, and knows so certainly that he could not live at all without it ? Isn't it distinctly to be seen in the development of each philosopher's theory, that he knows what is the chief significance of life beforehand . . . and is simply trying by a dubious intellectual path to come back to what every one knows ? " [1]

The experience here put into words is at some time or other a fact with every human soul. We see a beautiful piece of scenery, a beautiful sunset, a beautiful picture. We read a beautiful poem ; or we listen to a beautiful piece of music. Immediately we are driven to exclaim, with an absolute inner conviction, " Before the worlds were I was one with the meaning of that beauty. I have known it for ever. And thereto I swiftly return."

We all of us have moments of vision, when we behold essential truth or beauty, goodness or love, and with that vision there breaks through into our souls an Elder Life. We realize that it has been

[1] *Anna Karenina*, 898.

there hidden within us all the time, but only now have we come into conscious relationship with it. We realize also that it is eternal and immortal ; and that into it our true selves will return at death.

Through Christ we have learnt to call this Life not It but Him. We have come to know in such experiences the presence of the God Who is perfect truth and beauty, goodness and love.

That we may learn to practise the presence of this God, it is well that we should seek to reconstruct from time to time, and if possible daily, the content of such experiences. For we come to realize God best by recalling to mind the most perfect truth and beauty, goodness and love, of which we have ever heard or ever had experience. Through the contemplation of such human perfection our souls will be led on to remind themselves that God is infinitely more perfect still ; and thus there will be raised up in them the realization of the presence in gracious personal closeness of this Perfect God.

MODERN PLATONISM

The Platonic outlook upon the world is continually reproduced in subsequent writers, not only during the centuries immediately following Plato's own death, and during the years of the early Church, but to-day. A poet like Wordsworth shows constantly the influence of Platonic thought ; and in his greatest piece of work, the *Ode on the Intimations of Immortality*, he is indeed doing little more than putting into magnificent

poetical expression the familiar Platonic teaching about the soul's faculty for ' recollecting ' its prenatal vision of eternal and immutable reality.

Again, even the most modern of philosophies contains evident traces of Platonism. In developing his extremely fascinating theory—though indeed it is more than a theory—regarding the knowledge of reality as the process of becoming rather than as the world of things become, Oswald Spengler says : " Through this seeming anarchy, the keener glance can detect those pure forms which underlie all human becoming, penetrate their cloud-mantle, and bring them unwillingly to unveil." [1] It is a sentence which might have been quoted from any of the greatest dialogues of Plato ; and though Spengler's conception of the meaning of the ' pure forms ' of which he speaks is very different from Plato's conception of the divine Ideas, it is obvious that the Platonic influence over Spengler's mind has been immense. He has in him this high and noble passion, of which Plato spoke so much, and in which Plato himself dwelt—the passion to see reality behind appearance, to apprehend the heart of things behind the changing material curtain of the phenomenal world, to reach the universal and eternal Meaning behind the conditioned and the temporal.

To take another instance, from a piece of English literary criticism recently published in *The Times* : " The predominant passion of the poet's mind is but the counterpart of a predominant quality of the region of the universe

[1] *Decline of the West*, p. 103.

which he contemplates. His passion roused by the quality is reflected back upon the quality, and gives it redoubled power ; so that it begins to dominate all other qualities and properties, to suffuse them with itself, till it becomes as it were the living and governing soul of that which the poet contemplates. By means of his passion the actual realizes its own idea. However much we struggle we cannot avoid transcendentalism ; for we are seeking to approximate to a universe of quality with analogy for its most essential language through a universe of quantity with a language of identities. Sooner or later, and sooner rather than later, a transcendentalism (which is only the name for a prodigious metaphor) is inevitable."

Not only is this passage soaked in the characteristic Platonic outlook upon the world, but it expresses with remarkable insight the actual psychological process by which Plato's passion for beholding reality behind phenomenal appearance reaches its own satisfaction. The poet here spoken of is not merely the man who can write down his experiences in a certain literary style, but he is the seer whose creative vision (and by derivation even the very word 'poet' means 'creator') pierces through the world of appearance. He is the man of deep spiritual earnestness, who must go to the heart of reality. As he looks at the world spread out in space around him, his vision pierces through it to the Idea behind it : the Idea which is both transcendent and indwelling. He falls more and more passionately in love with that Idea, and is possessed more and

more deeply and completely by the desire to strip off all that hides the Idea and to show it to men as it is. In the pursuit of this end he brings into play a great variety of methods, all aimed at the disclosing of fundamental ideal reality. Music, poetry, inspired utterance—they all are instruments employed in a great act of *poesis*, comparable to the act of *poesis* performed by Michel Angelo when with ferocious energy he fell upon the intractable block of marble in the market-place at Florence, in order to strip forth from it the sublime figure of David which he beheld hidden within.

The poet, the man of spiritual vision, goes through life constantly beholding the Idea behind appearance, and with a constant craving, which sometimes becomes an insupportable pain, a fierce agony, that he may use his brief span of life to strip away at least a little of the veil of matter and appearance, and to show forth to mankind the beauty and truth which shine for him so radiantly behind that veil. The more earnestly he dwells in contemplation of the Idea, the deeper does this intolerable craving become in his heart. For Plato was eternally right when he laid down the principle that ideal reality strives to reproduce its likeness in this phenomenal world : and it can only so reproduce its true likeness through the agency of human souls devoted to its service. God can only create Godlikeness amongst men through the agency of faithful souls given up zealously to the task of making Him known as He is to other men.

The enterprise of stripping away the veil from

ideal reality involves of necessity a constant working upon the lives and souls of men, in order that they may be led to understand what is the meaning of the facts behind the world. In other words, the 'poet' is driven out amongst men, to explore every avenue of communication by which he may interpret reality to them. He is no austere and lonely recluse. He is a man amongst men, a man whose first task is to study and understand men. His periods of intense inner communion with reality, of contemplation of the Beatific Vision, only find their meaning beyond himself, in the unfailing impulse to hand on what he has seen, to tell others how admirable and perfect it is. Thus contemplation and interpretation alternate in his life, each closely bound up with the other, and each concentrated around the study of the Inward Christ—the divine Ideal, the indwelling Goal of our race—who must be released into effective Christlikeness in the life of every individual man and every community.

The 'poet' will find all methods of interpretation unsatisfactory—the most they can communicate to others is a fleeting and evanescent glimpse of truth. But in fact his own life will be his best method of interpretation; for unless 'the actual realizes its own idea' through him, in a life that genuinely manifests the ideal goodness, beauty and truth, his efforts are indeed in vain.

THE SUMMING-UP OF THE WHOLE MATTER

He who would be dear to God must, as far as is possible, be like Him.[1]

This is the very gist and heart of the Platonic vision of truth. The old man, writing his last work, sums up what he has seen of the meaning of man's life in the world with this majestic and final pronouncement.

We may consider it from various points of view.

In the first place, the teaching that man exists in order that he may show forth the likeness of God is fundamental to the Platonic idea of progress, and therefore was of immense significance in launching into the world the practical realization of that idea. It sets a goal before humanity which is so high and unattainable that we are indeed 'hitching our wagon to a star' in attempting to follow it. Yet it is a goal, an ideal, whose contemplation urges us ever forward in unsatisfied striving and continual progress towards its realization ; for it puts us into alignment with the Will of God—with that Will which sways the universe, and yet means for each one of us just this, and this only, that we must become like God in our own individual character and life (and this, for us Christians, means that the likeness of Christ must be formed in us).

Again, we may regard this great and final summing-up of Plato's philosophy from the point

[1] *Laws*, 716.

of view of its significance as a *preparatio evangelica* ; and we are at once struck by the fact that it foreshadows Christ's great ideal, 'Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect,' and also His promise that the love which was in Him should be in His followers also.

Again, we may regard it, thus reinforced and rendered dynamically compassable by the Living Personality of Christ, as a present-day message—a real practical ideal—for our own lives in relation to the problems of the world in which we live. Here we have the greatest thinker of humanity, at the end of a long life of patient and inspired searching after truth, declaring that the meaning of man's existence and the founding of the ideal life both for individual and community require that men should deliberately set themselves to allow the divine Will for Godlikeness to fulfil itself through them. This judgment is confirmed for us in the ideal which Christ, the Incarnate God Himself, set before His followers. Therefore as we follow the pathway of Godlikeness through prayer and the striving after the Beatific Vision, and through practical endeavour for the well-being of others and the fulfilment of the divine good-will for humanity, we are not merely comprehending aright the Good News brought by Plato, and appropriating the inestimable gift of Christ, but we are placing ourselves in line with the universal purpose. We are setting ourselves as tools in God's hands, that He, the Master-Artist, may use us for the creation of Goodnesss and Beauty, His own nature, by the transformation of the environment in which we live.

Finally, the fact that this ideal of Godlikeness is eternally above us and beyond us—that we for ever fail even to begin to attain it—brings us back inevitably to the insufficiency of Platonism, and to the necessity of the Cross, where God died to save us from our dark and futile impotence.

Printed in Great Britain by Butler & Tanner Ltd., Frome and London

LIBRARY
WESTERN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
EVANSTON, ILLINOIS

GTU Library
2400 Ridge Road
Berkeley, CA 94709
For renewals call (510) 649-2500
All items are subject to recall